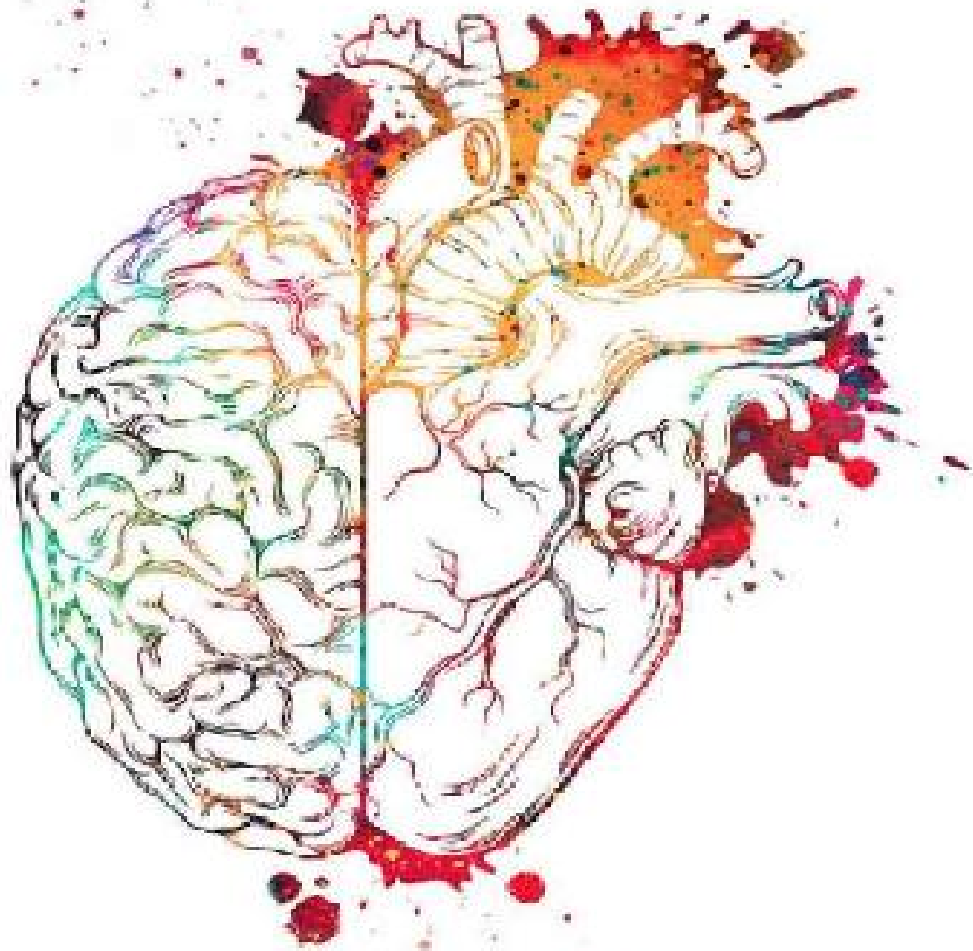


END ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, PANIC ATTACKS, CONTROL  
ANGER, NEGATIVE THINKING AND MASTER YOUR EMOTIONS



# THE BRAIN HEART LINK

ROBERT WAYFAIR

# **THE BRAIN HEART LINK**

*End Anxiety, Depression, Panic Attacks, Control  
Anger, Negative Thinking And Master Your Emotions*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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Hello and welcome to my book. My name is Robert Wayfair and I thank you for your purchase. I poured all of my knowledge and experience into this book, and I sincerely hope that it helps you on some level.

You may be aware of some of the suggestions I put forth in this book (although I'm confident It will *help you in your struggles with anxiety and intrusive thoughts*), or you may be like me many years ago when I thought there was no other option to mental suffering beyond prescription medication. If you've never explored this sort of thing before then I promise you that there are *many* options beyond prescription meds, and you absolutely do not need medication to be happy and healthy.

We're in no short supply of natural solutions. Diet alone can play such a huge role in how someone feels mentally, and it blows my mind that a doctor won't take two seconds to ask a patient about their diet before prescribing an anti-depressant.

Anyway, first off I want to start this book with a little bit about myself.

## 1.1 My Story

I know I know... the boring “about me” section. You probably want to get right to the good stuff, however I encourage you to read this section as you may identify with some of the things I mention.

The root of my issue is discussed a little in section 12 of this book, however I want to start with my introduction to anti-depressant medications. I was 22 years old. I had suffered with anxiety for probably about 8 years at that point. The anxiety snowballed into OCD, lack of self-confidence, and eventually a pretty bad depression. After many years of suffering I finally decided to get some help and made an appointment with my family doctor.

My doctor talked to me for all of about 10 minutes before prescribing me the medication Effexor (an SNRI... Serotonin Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitor). I didn't question him on this decision because I didn't know any better and I was all too happy to take a medication which I thought it would fix my problem. He didn't ask me about my diet, he didn't recommend that I exercise, he didn't check my vitamin D status, he didn't suggest meditation, he didn't ask one single question about *my experience* of my suffering... he just went straight to the meds.

This is beyond negligent behaviour for a doctor in my opinion, and is something that is happening to millions of people across the globe... not just me. To add to the negligence there was no discussion of the side-effects of the medication, nor was there any discussion of the severe withdrawal many people experience when stopping Effexor.

Anyway back to the story. So I did initially receive *some* help from the medication, however after a few years of use my anxiety actually got considerably worse (which can be an issue with these meds). I decided it was time to get off of Effexor and face my issues without medication. I tapered off of the meds slowly over a period of about eight months. I was doing ok until finally stopping the medication altogether, at which point my life fell apart. A depression hit me like nothing I'd ever felt before. Absolute darkness and despair. I came

close to having panic attacks (which I had never experienced before in my life) because I felt like I was going to lose my mind. I got “head zaps” (feels like an electric shock passing through your head) whenever I moved my eyes. Overall it was the worst experience of my life.

Had I followed my medical doctor’s advice of halting the medication over a period of a month I probably would have killed myself. And I say that in all earnestness and not figuratively. I was told that there’s no such thing as withdrawal and that what I was experiencing was due to my need for the medication. This is a common story you will be told if you’re on medication and is absolutely *NOT TRUE*. Withdrawal is unquestionably real and is experienced by most people when stopping their medications.

I tried to make it without meds for a month or two, but the depression and darkness (including ongoing bouts of crying out of nowhere) was too strong for me to continue, so I started taking an SSRI (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor, the most common type of antidepressant) called Cipralex. I gradually crawled out of the depression over the next few weeks and eventually felt somewhat normal again after a few months.

It was over the next several years that I learned pretty much everything I lay out in this book. What is discussed herein allowed me to finally taper off of Cipralex and live a life free of anxiety and depression without the use of medication. It was a long and difficult journey, but I’m happy to be here and happy to hopefully help you from falling into the same trap as I did.



## 1.2 The Pharmaceutical Theory of Disease

I put this in here because I know many of you are in the same situation, or *will be* in the same situation when you visit your doctor for mental health concerns. I know all too many people who have gone through this same scenario. It's a sad state of affairs that medications are still the "go to" for mental health because *we know better*. We have evidence showing that *exercise is as effective as Prozac for depression* yet doctors are prescribing these pills like there's no tomorrow.

Anti-depressant use in the United States rose 400% in teens and adults between 1994 and 2008. We have so much evidence to support alternative treatments for mental health yet these medications are being used more than ever and it's sickening. What's even worse is that a meta-analysis (an analysis of all existing studies on a certain subject) in 2010 concluded that anti-depressants provide "*minimal or non-existent*" efficacy for mild to moderate depression (medications were more effective for severe depression however).

The theory goes that you have a "defect" in your brain that doesn't allow you to produce adequate serotonin (for those of you who don't know, serotonin is the "happy" neurotransmitter). And that's the whole story. And guess what... they have a pill that will boost your serotonin and will fix your issue. This book is not about the pharmaceutical industry so I don't want to get too deep into this. Basically just know this "brain defect" theory is horseshit and has never been proven to be true. There is no "baseline" level of serotonin. Nobody has ever measured the "correct" amount of serotonin you should have in your brain, so how in the hell can someone tell you that you're deficient?

What we do know is that serotonin is *one of the factors* that makes a person happy. If you take a drug such as MDMA (ecstasy) for example you can experience tremendous happiness and pleasure.

However narrowing down the human experience of being depressed to deficient levels of a single neurotransmitter is ridiculous.

What's also interesting is that a number of other factors affect the levels of neurotransmitters in your brain. Your thoughts and your feelings about yourself have a tremendous impact on how your brain works (more on this in chapter 12). Sunlight directly effects the levels of neurotransmitters in your brain, as do a number of nutrients which your body requires to produce these neurotransmitters in the first place. And so on and so on.

What I'm trying to say here is that the pharmaceutical model of depression is ludicrous. They want you to think that there's something wrong with you (which I promise is not true of anyone reading this) and that they can fix you. Although serotonin may be *part* of the story, we know serotonin can be boosted naturally through a number of methods (adequate nutrition, supplements, sunlight, exercise etc.), as well as the fact that mood and well-being is certainly not *only* dependent on serotonin. Testosterone in men for example is associated with mood and confidence. Dopamine is associated with confidence and pleasure. GABA (a neurotransmitter) is calming, endorphins (released when we exercise) make us feel good, and so on and so on.

So, hopefully I've adequately established the fact here that medications are not the only option (and are not necessary) to treat anxiety and depression. Before getting into the meat of the book however I want to say a few more things about prescription meds.

## 1.3 Prescription Medications

First I want to say here that I'm mainly talking about prescription *anti-depressants*. These include mainly SSRI's, SNRI's, MAO inhibitors, tricyclic anti-depressants, and so on. By far the most common type of anti-depressant is the SSRI. My experience is with both SSRI's and SNRI's, so I know what those feel like and can't comment on other forms of anti-depressants personally.

The focus here is on anti-depressants because they are used commonly in both anxiety *and* depression. If a person suffers from anxiety then it is more than likely that there is a component of depression there as well (and vice-versa). This isn't always the case, however it's common and typical anti-depressants are a common treatment.

So, other than the fact that they're not particularly effective and that you don't actually need them, what are some of the other negatives of prescription anti-depressants? For me it basically comes down to three things...

### 1.3.1 Side-Effects

Traditional anti-depressants have a massive amount of potential side-effects.

Listing them all would take several pages, but a few of the more common ones are: feeling "blah" or emotionally blunted, dry mouth, weight gain, sexual dysfunction (particularly common in men, including decreased libido, erectile issues, and trouble reaching orgasm), drowsiness, and so on.

There are many many other potential side-effects which are possible on these meds which you won't be warned about. For example I experienced constant sneezing for about a year thinking I had developed allergies or that my room was too dusty. One day a friend was reading about side-effects of Cipralex and mentioned that sinusitis (inflammation of the sinusitis) is a side-effect of this medication. Once I tapered down to about half of my original dose

the sneezing went away. I also developed a bad case of tinnitus while on meds which is *not* pleasant to live with.

What's more interesting that is that *anxiety and depression themselves can be symptoms of anti-depressant medications!* Yes anxiety and depression are listed on some of these medications as potential side-effects. Some of these medications even have warnings about potentially causing suicidal thoughts. I believe I experienced this to a high degree with Effexor when my anxiety became extreme after a few years of its use.

### **1.3.2 Withdrawal**

I can say from personal experience that stopping a prescription medication can be a horrendous experience. If you're currently taking an anti-depressant please read this section.

I've experienced anti-depressant withdrawal first hand with two different anti-depressants: Effexor and Cipralex. Out of the two Effexor was *FAR* worse. As I stated above I experienced extreme depression, severe anxiety, hopelessness, "head zaps", crying at the drop of a hat, etc. It's almost funny to look back at it now, but during this period I remember crying my eyes out while watching the Disney movie Brave (note that I was a 30 year old man at the time). This type of crying is a very common side-effect of Effexor withdrawal. I know personally two other people whose lives also unraveled from quitting Effexor, amongst the hundreds of stories you'll read online.

Cipralex's withdrawal was *much* milder, however was still an issue for me and I had to take it very slow.

From what I've gathered Effexor and Paxil are the two worst anti-depressant medications to withdrawal from (as bad as Effexor is I've heard that Paxil is even worse). If you're on one of these medications this sucks to hear I know, but I want to give you fair warning. This doesn't mean that things are hopeless for you. It just means that you'll have a harder time and will likely need to take things much more slowly.

#### **1.3.2.1 How to Withdrawal**

First note that I am not a doctor. If you ever decide you want to stop taking your medication please consult your doctor or other qualified individual. Consult the prescribing professional and come up with a plan together to wean off your medication slowly. Here, I am simply speaking from my own personal experience.

**Note:** Many doctors (like mine) are for some crazy reason not aware of the severity of withdrawal symptoms. If your doctor suggests weaning off your medication quickly (say a month or quicker), I highly suggest you ask them to come up with a longer term plan (at least three to six months).

Also note that *I am NOT telling everyone reading this to stop your meds* (if you happen to be taking them). Stopping your medication is a big decision and should only be done if you *want* to stop and if you're ready to stop. If you're on a medication and you're happy taking it and don't want to stop, then don't. If you follow this book however and you feel your mood improving, then maybe stopping your meds is something you'll want to consider in the future.

So first off medication withdrawal is different for everyone. There are people who can stop anti-depressants cold turkey and feel perfectly fine, even with medications like Effexor and Paxil. On the other hand there are people who can slowly cut down on their meds over extended periods and experience horrible withdrawal. Unfortunately for me I was in the second category.

**Note\*\*\*:** Although you don't know which of these categories you're in I urge you to *never ever stop your medication cold turkey*. You do not want to find out the hard way that you experience terrible withdrawal symptoms. Stopping cold turkey can cause some people to become suicidal, so please do not do this.

So how do you actually stop your meds? I've found that the recommendations of most MD's or psychiatrists for stopping meds are way too fast. They may recommend a month or so, which is not

nearly enough time to come off meds especially if you're at a high dose. You'll experience horrible symptoms and will then be told you need the meds.

A good general guideline for tapering off prescription antidepressants is the following: cut 10 - 25% of your meds off at a time, wait til you stabilize, then continue. For example I was on 10 mg of Cipralext. I used nail clippers (the only thing I found that worked well enough) to cut about 25% of the tablet off. I then took about 75% of my original dose for a couple months until I felt normal again.

Every time you go through this process you will likely experience withdrawal which then may make you think that you actually need the meds. I encourage you to give it some time however. Every time you cut down give it at least two weeks to a month to see how you feel. This was a big challenge for me when I was cutting down.

Every cut would increase my anxiety and decrease my mood and I would doubt my ability to come off the meds. A few weeks to a month would go by and I would be back to normal however and would start the process again.

Basically the slower you go the easier this process will be, however it will also increase the time it takes to come off the medication. It took me a year to get off of Cipralext. I know that may sound insane to some of you, but I was ok with it. Could I have gone faster? Yes for sure, I just would have experienced more withdrawal each time I tapered. The decision of how fast you want to go is up to you. I would suggest however that you take at least 3 - 6 months to fully get off of a medication.

**Note:** Some meds (like Effexor) come in capsules with granules inside and you can't physically cut them up. In these cases you'll have to open the capsules up and take a small amount of granules out.

Lastly following the tips outlines in this book will likely help withdrawal symptoms. Getting your nutrition up to scratch, exercising, etc. will all help. Also certain herbs such as passionflower can be very calming and can help with the withdrawal process.

### **1.3.3 Prevention from Healing**

Pharmaceutical medications can be helpful to suppress anxious or depressive symptoms, but in doing so they actually prevent you from healing and getting better. Anxiety and depression are expressions of something going on inside of you... something that needs to be addressed (we will discuss this in detail in section 12), and in disconnecting from these feelings true healing can't occur. While anxiety and depression really suck and are uncomfortable to live with, suppressing these symptoms is only separating you from yourself.

Not only do these medications suppress anxiety and depression, but they suppress your emotions as a whole. Happiness, joy, anger, irritability... it all becomes diminished. You could say that these meds suppress who you are as a person. Disconnecting from you in this way is simply not the path to healing.

I can speak from experience that the meds I took were like a straitjacket on me. They disconnected me from my true self and prevented me from fully embracing and overcoming my issues. Although I had a lot of fear of coming off my medication, doing so was a necessary part of healing for me.

To reiterate again though, please don't stop your medication if you're not ready to yet. If you're not at that stage yet that's ok. You'll get there, and when the time is right you can make the effort to slowly and safely taper off your meds.

Alright let's get started with the first real section...

## 2. NUTRITION

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Nutrition is one of the cornerstones of health. I probably don't need to ramble on about how a proper diet is essential for the optimal health of your body and mind, so I won't. Basically: if you're eating like crap, you're probably going to feel like crap. It can be a little trickier than this for some people however. You may have a really solid diet but not realize that certain foods you're eating are contributing to your anxiety or depression. We'll get into this below.

Ok so... when it comes to nutrition we want to focus on two main things:

1. Minimizing inflammation
2. Food sensitivities (linked to inflammation and poor absorption of nutrients)

I'll also have a "general recommendations/summary" section at the end.



## 2.1 Preface

Before starting this section I want to say that these are *general guidelines*. Don't think that to feel good you have to follow these rules 100%, because that is likely not true. Sometimes the anxiety of "I have to eat this or I won't feel good", or "I can't eat this or I won't feel good" can be more destructive than letting go and breaking the rules sometimes. A good guideline to follow is the 80:20 rule... that is to say you eat well 80% of the time, and allow yourself to cheat 20% of the time. You may have to experiment with this to see exactly what works for you. Perhaps you can get away with 70:30, or maybe you need to move up to 90:10... everyone is different.

So let's begin.

## **2.2 Inflammation**

Chronic inflammation is at the root of nearly all “non-communicable” diseases, i.e. diseases that aren’t caused by infectious bacteria or viruses. That is to say that inflammation is a key feature in virtually all modern diseases such as heart disease (and other vascular diseases), cancer, diabetes, auto-immune diseases, chronic pain, etc. Research within the past few years has also shown that inflammation is linked to mental suffering, such as anxiety and depression. As you can imagine when we have chronic low -level inflammation in the brain it’s likely going to hinder our brain’s ability to function properly. Research linking mental suffering with inflammation is a hot topic, and growing evidence is building a stronger and stronger association between the two.

In today’s world we have a massive selection of pro-inflammatory foods which are all too easy and too tasty for many people to avoid. Minimizing these foods, as well as consuming foods which counter inflammation can have a significant impact on our mental health.

The most prolific inflammation-causing foods are: sugar, vegetable oils, and trans-fats. Let’s start with sugar.

### **2.2.1 Sugar**

I put sugar as #1 on the list because it is so ubiquitous in the modern diet, and because it is a totally unnecessary food to consume. Yes our bodies use glucose to produce needed usable energy, however we can get glucose from other food sources such as complex carbohydrates, which do not have the same inflammatory effect.

Moreover the spike and drop in blood sugar caused by sugar consumption can also affect mood (this is more likely to affect anxiety rather than depression). Other effects of sugar include potentiating the growth of opportunistic bacteria in our gut, lowering testosterone in men, and suppressing immune function, all of which can affect our mental health (we will discuss the impact of the gut on mental health in more detail later).

The average American consumes about 100 POUNDS of sugar per year. This is a staggering amount of sugar when you consider that the amount was half of this one hundred years ago, and one tenth of this a few hundred years ago.

So how do we avoid/minimize sugar? This one is easy enough... basically avoid sugary foods and drinks. In particular, many people probably don't realize the *huge amount of sugar that is packed into drinks such as soda and coffee* (not actual coffee, but a flavored coffee you might get at a place like Starbucks).

One can of Coca-cola contains 39 grams of sugar. Drinking one can of Coke per day would have you consuming about 31 pounds of sugar per year, and that's not counting any other sources of sugar in your diet. A medium Java Chip Frappuccino at Starbucks contains *66 grams of sugar*.

A 12 oz glass of orange juice (the same size as a can of Coke) contains 28 grams of sugar. If you're a juice drinker you may be consuming way more sugar than you think you are. Now fruit itself can contain high amounts of sugar, however much less than a glass of fruit juice. For example a single orange only contains 9 grams of sugar, and moreover the orange (as well as other fruits) contain fiber, which help to slow the entrance of sugar into your blood. Fiber also has other benefits which we'll get into later.

I probably don't need to name these, but other sources of sugar include sports drinks, cookies, cakes, pies, sugar cereals, etc. etc. Another hidden source of sugar is fast food or pre-made products in the grocery store.

Example: a Big Mac contains 9 grams of added sugar. Pre-packaged foods such as yogurt, sauces, granola, soups, protein bars, etc. can also have tons of sugar added to them, so be sure to check labels.

**Note:** if you're interested in learning more about the devastating effects of sugar I'd highly recommend the book *pure, white and deadly* as well as the documentary *The Truth about Sugar*.

## **2.2.2 Vegetable Oil and Trans-Fats**

Although it sounds healthy (i.e. VEGETABLE oil), it is highly inflammatory, and a hidden ingredient in many packaged foods. Moreover it is not something that most people realize is bad for them.

When I refer to vegetable oils I am talking about the following: anything called “vegetable” oil, corn oil, canola oil, peanut oil, sunflower oil, soybean oil, safflower oil, cottonseed oil. All of these oils contain high amounts of *omega 6 fatty acids*.

In short, omega 6 fats are precursors to a number of molecules in our body which are pro-inflammatory. On the other hand, omega 3 fats are precursors to *anti-inflammatory* molecules. Historically the levels of omega 6 to omega 3 fats have been consumed in the ratio of about 1:1 to 4:1, i.e. for every 4 grams of omega 6 fat consumed one gram of omega 3 fat was consumed. In the modern Western diet these levels can be *20:1 or higher*. So what we want to do essentially is minimize our consumption of omega 6 fatty acids.

**Note:** Omega 6 fatty acids are actually essential to life, most people are simply consuming way too much of them.

The main source of these oils is going to be anything processed or packaged in the grocery store, i.e. chips, cookies, salad dressings, fast food, etc. Peanuts are also high in omega 6 fats. In particular you want to avoid anything deep-fried as these foods are drenched in this type of oil. Also when cooking at home (or making salad dressings, etc.) use oils/fats such as coconut oil, olive oil, fish oil, and butter. Yes butter. Butter and other healthy fats have been demonized over the past 50 years for no good reason. We will discuss this in more detail further down.

Trans-fats are a man-made fat (other than being naturally present in milk and some dairy products) which are overall terrible for you (in particular for your heart) as well as being inflammatory. Trans-fats are made when oils are hydrogenated (i.e. a hydrogen atom is added to a non-trans-fat). Sources of trans-fats include anything that has “hydrogenated” in the ingredients list, so be sure to check labels.

One major source of trans-fats is margarine. If you use margarine switch to butter, coconut oil, or olive oil.

Another way trans-fats are created is super-heating oil, i.e. deep-frying. Basically avoid anything deep fried.

### **2.2.3 Alcohol**

A quick note on alcohol before finishing this section. Alcohol *in moderation* (the equivalent of about one glass of wine or one beer per day) has been shown to be beneficial to overall health and inflammation. Chronic alcohol use in excess of this amount (or binge drinking) is generally harmful.

## 2.3 Food Sensitivities

I want to keep talking about what to avoid before getting to what you actually *should* eat. On that subject let's get to food sensitivities.

Having a food sensitivity can seriously affect your mental health, and can contribute significantly to your suffering. Food sensitivities can create all sorts of problems such as head fog, anxiety, depression, fatigue, bloating, irritable bowel syndrome, etc. Eliminating foods that your body doesn't agree with can have a big impact on how you feel.

I want to note here that just because you may not have digestive symptoms does not necessarily mean you don't have a food sensitivity. This topic is definitely still worth looking into even if you don't have the typical symptoms of a food sensitivity such as abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhea, etc.

### 2.3.1 Food Sensitivities and Inflammation

Yup we're back to inflammation. The reason food sensitivities can affect us so much is because they can cause inflammation. If we are "sensitive" to a certain food that means that our immune system in our gut is reacting to antigens (a foreign substance which induces an immune response) on the food. Active immune system = inflammation.

Inflammation in the gut basically means food is not being absorbed properly. We have little extensions of our gut wall called "microvilli" in our intestines. Food is absorbed into the gut through these microvilli. When these are inflamed the surface area of absorbability in our gut significantly decreases, and we don't absorb our nutrients properly. This in itself is a problem because we need all sorts of nutrients for our bodies and our minds to work optimally.

Things can get slightly more serious however when we develop something called "leaky gut". Essentially what this means is the inflammation in our bowels has created micro-pores in our intestinal walls through which tiny amounts of food can pass through. This is *NOT* supposed to happen in normal intestinal functioning. Once

these particles pass through the intestinal wall then our immune system within our body will also react to them, creating inflammation in the body (fatigue, joint pain, etc.) and nervous system (anxiety, depression, head fog, etc.).

To summarize: we want to eliminate food sensitivities. Luckily for us this is easy and free.

## 2.3.2 The Elimination Diet

An elimination diet simply involves eliminating the foods which are most likely to cause a food sensitivity. These foods are eliminated from the diet for one month, and then re-introduced one by one thereafter. The most common causes of food sensitivities include:

1. Gluten
  1. Wheat, rye, barley, triticale, malt, brewer's yeast
2. Dairy
  1. Milk, butter, cheese, yoghurt, etc.
3. Eggs
4. Deadly nightshades
  1. Tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, goji berries, peppers (bell peppers, chili peppers, cayenne, paprika, tamales, pimentos, etc.)

Understandably this is a lot of food to eliminate, and as such you don't have to do it all at once. The big two (by far the most common culprits) are *gluten and dairy*... if you're going to start anywhere I would start here. Eggs are less common, and deadly nightshades even less so, however they are still a possibility.

So how does this work? Let's say we're doing an elimination diet with only gluten. As I explained above you simply eliminate all sources of gluten from your diet for one month. The big one here is going to be wheat as it is in a ton of food. This involves no wheat whatsoever for an entire month... no cheating. If you cheat you will have to start over. Once the month is over, re-introduce gluten into

your diet. If you notice a worsening of your symptoms then gluten is a problem for you and should be avoided. If you didn't notice an improvement over the month and you don't feel worse upon re-introducing gluten, then you're good and you can move on to dairy.

If you're able to try avoiding all gluten, dairy, eggs, and deadly nightshades at the same time. This will save you from having to do the elimination diet over and over again. It is however important that you *only re-introduce one food at a time*. Once you re-introduce a new food wait several days to see how you respond, then reintroduce a new food. If you re-introduce more than one food too quickly you won't know which food was the problem.

**Note:** Food sensitivity blood tests are available, usually via a naturopathic doctor. These tests will look at markers in your blood and provide you with a long list of foods you're allergic to, and the degree to which you're allergic to them. I would however not recommend these tests due to the fact that studies have shown that they are unreliable (different companies who test the same person will come up with different foods that that person is allergic to). There are other reasons why this testing isn't reliable but I won't waste time going into them here. Basically don't waste your money on these. An elimination diet is easy, free, and 100% accurate because you can judge for yourself what is affecting you and what isn't. Also, there is one other tool we can use to determine food sensitivities which we'll cover below.

### 2.3.3 Diet Diary

A diet diary is simply a log of everything you've eaten for the past week for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. Simply Google "diet diary", then go to images and you'll find a few charts already made for you. The key here is you're going to want to also record how you feel every day, so find a chart with extra columns for "symptoms" or "comments". For example you may comment "depression was worse today", "bad head fog", "I felt great", "I feel like horse shit", etc. etc. In doing so you're able to see the connection between your mood and the foods you're eating. This can be a great tool on top of the



elimination diet as you may catch a food which has been bothering you but which you haven't noticed. I would do this for at least a week, but two would be ideal.

## 2.4 Summary and Tips

So to summarize, we want to avoid/minimize sugar, vegetable oils or other high sources of omega 6 fats, and trans-fats. In general this comes down to avoiding pre-packaged, processed, and man-made foods. We also want to do an elimination diet as well as keeping a diet diary to weed out foods which we're sensitive to and which may aggravate our mood.

I want to re-iterate that *you do not need to be perfect*. If you want to have a dessert sometimes then go ahead. If you love peanuts then eat them. Food is meant to be enjoyed and is one of the great pleasures of life. You don't have to be 100% perfect here. As I said above the anxiety and stress of having to have a perfect diet can be more of a problem than the actual bad foods themselves. I'll cheat and have soda sometimes or eat McDonald's and have dessert and I do just fine. Again, the 80:20 rule is a good guideline to follow.

I would note however on the other hand that if you eat sugar or you do go to McDonald's and you notice that you feel like garbage, then you may want to be more cautious about eating this kind of stuff.

**Note:** Not *everyone* has food sensitivities. There are tons of books out there now on gluten and wheat and how it's the devil and everyone should avoid it. Well if you eliminate gluten from your diet and you don't feel any better, then why avoid it? Do what works for you and what makes your life easier.

Now let's move on to a few general suggestions for what you *should* be eating...

### 2.4.1 Fruits and Vegetables

You've probably heard this a billion times by now, but eating adequate fruits and vegetables is key to good health. For one, fruits and vegetables are anti-inflammatory, and as we know from above inflammation can affect our mental functioning. Second, fruits and vegetables provide us with fiber (which is necessary to feed the bacteria in our gut), vitamins, minerals, and anti-oxidants, all of

which affect our mental functioning as well as the health of our bodies overall. Higher intakes of fruits and vegetables are also associated with lower incidence of cancer, heart disease, osteoporosis, etc. etc.

Basically eat your fruits and vegetables... the more the better. Understandably it can be tough to fit in the suggested eight servings of fruits and vegetables today, but I would hit that if you can. If not aim for at least four per day.

It's easy to read around the internet and get stuck on fads promoting super foods or the next big fruit or vegetable you should eat. I'd say ignore all that shit and eat the fruits and vegetables that you like. If you like it then you're gonna eat it, and it's more important to get that volume in than to eat something you don't like that you're not gonna eat all that often.

My one suggestion here would be berries. Berries are great in that they're generally low in sugar and have high amounts of antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds. I usually have a big bowl of frozen blueberries before bed with lots of cinnamon and almond butter, which is a delicious and healthy snack.

On that note, spices are also a great source anti-inflammatory compounds. Basically any spice out there is going to be beneficial to your health. Personally I love cinnamon because it tastes good and has a number of other health benefits (decreasing inflammation, controlling blood sugar, optimizing cholesterol levels, etc.), but use whatever you like. Another very well-known excellent anti-inflammatory spice is turmeric, used traditionally quite a bit in Indian cuisine.

**Note:** If you're going to be using lots of cinnamon don't use traditional cassia cinnamon as it has high levels of coumarin which can be toxic in the long run. Ceylon cinnamon is preferable and is pretty damn cheap if you get it on amazon. Ceylon cinnamon

## 2.4.2 Fats

Fats have been erroneously demonized over the past several decades. With the exception of trans-fats and excessive levels of omega 6 fats, fat is good for us. Our nervous system is made largely of fat, and therefore we require adequate intake of fat for our brains to function properly. Other roles of fats include providing the body energy, helping with the absorption of fat soluble vitamins, and regulating the production of sex hormones, i.e. *estrogen and testosterone*, both of which are associated with positive mental health in both men and women.

I suggest you embrace fat and consume a healthy amount of it on a daily basis. As above, good fats to consume are olive oil, coconut oil, butter, and fish oil (more on fish oil in the supplements section). Avocados, nuts, seeds, and meat are also good sources of fat.

It's easy to add these foods to your daily diet: you can dip bread in olive oil and vinegar (or add that combo to your salad dressing), add coconut oil to a smoothie or cook in it, use melted butter on pretty much any food to increase its flavor, eat fish or meat several times per week, eat a handful of almonds, etc. etc.

**Note:** Some nuts have relatively high contents of omega 6 fats. Nuts are however more than just balls of fat and are great sources of protein, fiber, and antioxidants. The good of all the constituents of nuts seems to outweigh the bad, as regular nut consumption has been shown to be quite beneficial overall to health. Also note that peanuts are technically legumes – not nuts – and do not have these same benefits (hence I would not recommend them as I would other nuts). Also avoid nuts packaged or roasted in vegetable oil, i.e. buy them raw and roast them yourself without oil if you like.

**Note:** As I mentioned fats have been wrongly criticized in recent history, and this pertains in particular to saturated fats which are found in high amounts in butter and animal products. Research in recent years has shown that there is basically zero link between

saturated fats and heart disease, and moreover that in countries where saturated fats are consumed in high amounts (i.e. much of Europe), the incidence of heart disease is actually lower than in places where saturated fats are consumed in lower quantities.

**Note:** If you're interested in learning more about fat and its importance to our health, I'd highly recommend watching the documentary *Fat Head* (free on youtube).

### 2.4.3 Meat

If you're a vegan or a vegetarian then this section is likely a turn off for you, but please read on because the information is important.

So understandably everyone doesn't want to eat meat. That's fine and an admirable choice, however I want to mention that meat is an important part of a healthy diet as it provides nutrients, which you can't get elsewhere, namely iron and vitamin B12.

**Note:** High sources of B12 are red meat, beef liver, sardines, and mackerel. B12 is also found in non-meat products such as eggs, milk, and yogurt, but in much smaller amounts. Also, some fortified cereals have fairly high levels of added B12.

**Note:** Iron is found in plants, however it is in a form which our bodies do not absorb very well.

B12 is crucial to the proper functioning of our nervous system, and you're *probably* not going to be getting enough of it if you're not eating meat regularly. The same goes for iron, however iron generally has more of an impact on our energy than on our mood. Moreover meat provides us with protein (required for an innumerable amount of bodily processes), fat, and other B vitamins which are needed by our bodies and our brains (more on mental health and B vitamins in the supplements section).

Meat does go on our "inflammatory" foods list, however it is still important due to the nutrients that it provides. If you're eating a well-balanced diet with lots of fruits and vegetables, then the inflammation caused by meat is not going to be an issue. Meats lower on the inflammatory list include turkey and fish (fish is actually

anti-inflammatory and will be discussed later in the supplements section).

As for carbs I'd go with pretty much whatever you like that grows out of the ground. Potatoes, sweet potatoes, quinoa (awesome source of carbs as well as protein), rice, etc. Eating carbs in the form of processed garbage is all too easy, so try to go with natural sources. If you're not sensitive to wheat then by all means eat bread and/or pasta.

**Note:** Although highly criticized wheat actually does contain a fairly high amount of B vitamins.

**Note for vegans and vegetarians:** I would highly recommend getting your iron and vitamin B12 levels checked, as low levels can greatly affect your energy and mood. If you're low then supplementing (see supplements section) is pretty cheap and easy and can drastically improve your well-being. Additionally ensure you get enough protein (about 0.9 g/kg of body weight). If you're not getting enough protein then it's easy to supplement with a vegan or vegetarian protein powder.

## 2.4.4 Summary

Eat lots of fruits and vegetables, embrace fat and don't avoid it (other than excessive omega 6 fats and trans- fats), and eat meat/ animal products if you're not opposed to it. Avoid sugar, vegetable oil and trans-fats as much as possible. Ensure you try out a diet diary and/or an elimination diet to see if certain foods are affecting your mood.

There are tons of other great options I haven't covered here (chick peas, lentils, various types of beans, tofu, etc.) and can't cover because otherwise I would be writing forever. Basically *eat what you like* and ensure that most of it grows from the ground or is an animal source, i.e. isn't processed.

### 3. GUT HEALTH

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The health of our intestines (i.e. our gut) is crucial to our overall health, and yes this includes our mental health. Just Google “gut mental health” or other variations of the phrase and see what comes up. While we’ve talked above about food sensitivities and gut health, in this section I am referring to the microbiome of our gut, i.e. the bacteria living inside of our intestines.

This may seem like an odd idea... like how exactly does the bacteria in my gut effect my mental functioning? “How” is a little technical for the book, however the evidence is clear: the bacteria in our gut are intimately linked with the physiological functioning of our bodies and minds. The more time goes on, the more research is completed, and the clearer this connection becomes.

So what can we do about it? A few things:

1. Feed the bacteria that is there
2. Eliminate factors which negatively impact our gut
3. Add bacteria directly to our gut

### **3.1 Feeding Our Gut Bacteria**

This comes back again to the importance of fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are high in fiber, which is what is going to feed our gut bacteria. That's what fiber is... it's a substance which our bodies can't digest or absorb, but which our gut bacteria can. Providing our gut bacteria with adequate fiber is crucial to help them flourish and maintain their numbers. Other options here are supplements such as chicory root powder, a fantastic prebiotic (food for bacteria), or raw garlic.



## 3.2 Avoiding the Negative

The obvious here is antibiotics. While antibiotics are incredible life-saving medications, they are grossly overprescribed and can have a negative impact on our gut which can be difficult to recover from. Many antibiotics are “broad spectrum”, meaning they don’t discriminate between which bacteria in our bodies they kill. They will kill the pathogenic bacteria you’re taking them for, however they will also kill many of the beneficial bacteria in your gut. This leaves room for “bad bacteria” and yeast to come in and fill the space just vacated by the beneficial bacteria. This excess of bad bacteria or yeast can impact our mental and physical health significantly (much more on this in section 11).

I don’t know your situation so it’s not my place to tell you never to take antibiotics. You may legitimately require them at some point in the future. This is just an FYI on their potential negative impact on health and their rampant over-prescription. There are many natural options in the form of herbs which are powerful anti- microbials that can be taken without having the same negative impact on our gut flora. The following is a fantastic brief podcast on the over-prescribing and negative effects of antibiotics:

[White Coat Black Art - Antibiotics Mini Podcast](#)

Next up is NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), i.e. pain medications. These include aspirin, Advil (ibuprofen), Aleve (naproxen), etc. These drugs can not only damage the intestinal walls and create leaky gut (which we talked about above), but they may also alter the microbiome of our intestines. Understandably these medications are necessary for some people with chronic pain, however for many conditions there are alternative natural solutions which don’t have the same negative effect on our gut health, such as avoiding inflammation and using supplements such as fish oil, curcumin, boswellia serrata, and so on.

**Note:** Near infrared light can be very effective for acute or chronic pain. We will discuss near infrared light in greater detail in section

6 below.

Finally, stress can negatively impact our gut bacteria. Stress is part of everyone's life, however it affects some of us more negatively than others. How stress affects us is often due to *our own interpretation of the stress*, rather than the actual stressful event itself. Improving our mental health in general (which hopefully this book will help you do) as well as techniques such as meditation (discussed in detail in section 7 below) can help to greatly reduce our stress.

### **3.3 Probiotics**

Another option for improving your gut flora is adding bacteria to your gut directly by buying a probiotic supplement. There have been a few studies conducted so far which have shown a positive impact on mood through probiotic supplementation. Unfortunately we're not at the point yet where we know exactly which bacteria are associated with depression or anxiety, so as of now your best bet is a multi-strain (multiple species of bacteria) high dose probiotic. We will discuss this in more detail in the supplements section.

Other options here include fermented foods (foods with bacteria in them) such as kefir, yogurt, kombucha, and pickled foods such as sauerkraut, pickles, pickled beets, etc. These are all great additions to a healthy diet and a healthy gut.

## 4. SLEEP

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Proper and adequate sleep is crucial for mental and physical health. Studies have shown the significant effect of sleep deprivation on disrupting or heightening emotions, as well as the relation between lack of sleep and conditions such as anxiety and depression.

A study in 2014 showed that some people may start to experience symptoms of psychosis after being awake for only 24 hours. I won't ramble on any more about this because you've probably heard of the importance of sleep a million times by now. Basically in conclusion: proper sleep is essential to optimal mental functioning, far more than you may think.

As I stated above, there is a link between poor sleep and mental disorders. This raises the question however of which comes first... the mental disorder or the poor sleep? Does your mood suffer because you don't sleep properly, or do you have trouble sleeping because of issues with mood? Do you over-sleep because you are depressed, or are you feeling depressed because you're oversleeping?

Personally I feel that this goes both ways. For example someone has anxiety and lies in bed at night with a racing mind and can't fall asleep for several hours. They end up getting 5 hours sleep instead of 8. The lack of sleep exacerbates this person's anxiety, which in turn effects sleep quality even more.

I totally empathize with this because I've had major issues with sleep in the past. I would often oversleep due to low mood or severe trouble getting out of bed in the morning. Sleeping 10 - 12 hours would leave me feeling foggy all day, which would make my anxiety worse and would push my bed time back later and later to the point where I would wake up at 2 to 4 pm (and let me tell you, waking up at 4 pm is not conducive to a good mood).

Moreover this late bed time would result in a severe lack of sleep on days where I had to get up early, which would also significantly affect my anxiety. It was a bit of a rollercoaster and something I struggled with for a years.

Anyway enough about me. So what can we do about it? Our mood isn't particularly great, so how are we supposed to sleep properly? Well there are a number of steps we can take (as well as a few supplements) to ensure we get adequate sleep. Moreover following the tips in the rest of this guide can have a significant improvement on your mood, which on their own can directly improve your sleep.

Ok so let's get to it. I'm sure you've heard some of these before, but I encourage you to read the whole list because there may be a couple tips you haven't heard of.

## 4.1 Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene involves certain practices or habits you follow daily which help promote optimal sleep. I'll list them here and then cover each briefly afterwards.

1. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day
2. Go to bed before midnight
3. Avoid stimulants near bed time
4. Avoid doing anything in bed other than sleeping or having sex

### 4.1.1 Sleep/Wake Cycle

So first off, going to bed and waking up at the same time every day is incredibly important. This is probably the most important tip here yet the most difficult to follow for some people. Our bodies love routine and will fall into the habit of getting tired and waking up at the same time if you follow the same sleep/wake pattern for a period of time.

Personally when I don't follow this pattern my body doesn't know what the hell is going on. Getting out of bed can be extremely difficult because my body doesn't know whether it's time to get up or keep sleeping. When I have a schedule down pat however I tend to wake up near the time my alarm goes off, and the morning fatigue is pretty much eliminated.

I know from experience that this is really tough to get down, but I urge you to put some effort into it. You're more likely to be able to fall asleep, to stay asleep throughout the night, and to be able to get up in the morning if you follow this rule. If you can't get out of bed in the morning then put an extra alarm across the room to force yourself to get up. If you're browsing Facebook for "just another minute" (which usually ends up being far

longer) before bed then force yourself to put your phone down and go to bed at your set time.

Keeping sleep and wake times constant helps keep our circadian rhythm consistent. Our circadian rhythm is essentially your body's internal mechanism of keeping time. It is not only involved in sleep, but in the release and control of many physiological molecules in your body, some of which are directly related to mood. If you're interested in learning a little bit more, check out this 4 minute video on the topic:

[Circadian Rhythm and Your Brain's Clock](#)

Understandably this is also difficult to follow on the weekends because you may want to stay out late or sleep in. I'd still however recommend trying to keep bed time and wake up time within 2 hours of your normal routine so you don't confuse your body too much on a weekly basis.

### **4.1.2 Go to Bed Before Midnight**

Another tough one to follow, especially if you're a night owl. Going to bed before midnight is important however because it aligns our bodies with the natural rhythm of the sun.

Sunlight is a natural stimulant. As described in the video above, light from the sun stimulates our retinas (the back of our eyeballs), which sends signals to the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) in the brain. The SCN is responsible for producing melatonin, which is a major control of our sleep/wake cycle (melatonin is a hormone made in our brain and is produced in greater quantities the darker it gets and is responsible for making you tired so you can fall asleep). Humans have evolved over millennia following this natural cycle, i.e. waking up when the sun comes up, and sleeping not too long after the sun goes down. It is how our bodies are designed to work, and it is how you will (likely) function optimally.

There are certain people who will have a natural resilience to this and will be able to go to bed at 2 or 4 am with little ill effect. However I urge you to give this one a try as well for at least a month.

### **4.1.3 Avoiding Stimulants**

The obvious here is caffeine. Caffeine directly suppresses the urge to sleep and should be avoided many hours before bed time. The same goes for nicotine. While alcohol can help you fall asleep it has been shown to reduce sleep quality (as have pharmaceutical sleep agents).

For certain people food close to bed time can also cause problems getting to sleep or staying asleep. Try avoiding large meals near bed time as well as avoiding heavy, fatty, fried, or spicy foods, as well as citrus and carbonated beverages.

Light is also a major stimulant which can poorly affect sleep which we will discuss in detail in section 4.2.

#### **4.1.4 Use Your Bed For Sleep Only**

Sleep studies have shown that sleep quality improves when the bed is used only for sleeping or for having sex. This means no time on your phone, no TV, and even no reading in bed. Sex however for some reason is a go on this one.

Personally I still read in bed and sleep fine... I find it very relaxing to read in bed with a nice mellow light going before sleeping. I would however recommend doing nothing in bed but sleep or sex for at least two weeks to see how it affects you.



## 4.2 Blue Light Filters

Back to the SCN. The SCN is stimulated by light. This light triggers the SCN to shut down the production of melatonin, which makes us sleepy. So constant light = lower levels of melatonin = less sleepy.

Now understandably you're not gonna sit in the dark for several hours once the sun goes down. While this would probably be ideal for sleep, it's totally impractical. There is however one source of light which we can avoid... blue light.

Blue light is particularly stimulating to the SCN. Think blue = sky = daytime... this is the message your brain is getting. Stimulation by blue light near bed time can not only make it harder for us to fall asleep, but also decrease the *quality* of our sleep.

So, what are light sources high in blue light? Your computer, your phone, and your TV. These sources are all very high in blue light and stimulating to the brain. Again, living in the modern world you're probably not going to avoid all of these after dark. So what can you do? Install a blue light filter on your phone and computer.

I use [f.lux](#) for my computer which works amazingly well. It consumes a minimal amount of computer resources and is very effective. Moreover f.lux actually reduces or eliminates blue light from the light source, rather than simply superimposing a red tint to the screen like some other blue light filters do. You can set f.lux to run only at night, but I keep it at the same setting (2700K) day and night. It does produce a red tint to your computer screen, however I've come to like the look of the red much better than the usual blue tint the screen has.

As a trial install f.lux and leave it on for an hour at 2700K at night. Now disable it briefly and see how ridiculously glaring the blue light is. The difference to me is staggering. Now imagine that light hitting your eyes for several hours before bed.

I use f.lux for my phone (Android) as well, however f.lux requires you to root your phone (have special permissions) for it to work. If your

phone isn't rooted then you'll have to use another app.

Unfortunately I don't know of any of these apps for TV's (maybe there are new smart TV apps out there though, I don't know). One option is to sit far away from the TV, or another option would be to get a pair of [blue light filtering glasses](#) which you can wear all night or just in front of the TV.

**Note:** Natural sources of light such as candles are much lower in blue light than synthetic sources. Incandescent bulbs are also fairly low in blue light compared to LED's and fluorescent bulbs which are very high in blue light.

### 4.2.1 More on Light

Now that we've discussed the importance of light on sleep quality I want to mention one other point. Sleeping in complete darkness has been shown to increase sleep quality. Even if your room is fairly dark, you can still have slight amounts of light passing to your retina and stimulating your SCN. The results can be a lower quality of sleep. Hence it is optimal to sleep in a fully and completely dark room.

Achieving total darkness in your room is possible through either total blackout curtains or through a sleep mask. Personally I use a sleep mask. Try to get a thick, comfortable, and blocks out 100% of light even in a brightly lit room. It can be *slightly* uncomfortable when lying on your side however due to its thickness.

There are other much cheaper sleep masks you can get on amazon, most of which work fairly well. The only problem I've noticed with some of them is that even though the block light coming directly at you, there will be small cracks around the side of the mask which lets light in. The Tempurpedic mask however forms a perfect seal around all edges.

## 4.3 Exercise

Alright now that we've gotten sleep hygiene down let's cover a few other topics. Exercise is not only key due to its direct effects on mood (more on this in section 8), but it's effect on sleep as well. 30 - 40 minutes of exercise four times per week has been shown to have significant improvements on sleep quality scores.

If you're not exercising and have trouble sleeping, I would highly recommend adding some exercise 3 - 4 times per week into your routine. Just make sure you don't exercise within 3 - 4 hours before bed as it can affect your ability to fall asleep.

## 4.4 Sleep Supplements

Sleep supplements can be very useful if you have trouble falling asleep, however some of them have also been shown to improve sleep *quality* (in contrast to pharmacological sleep aids which have been shown to actually decrease sleep quality).

These supplements include melatonin, tryptophan, lavender, passionflower, chamomile, 5-HTP, and valerian.

### Melatonin

Melatonin is the #1 go to when it comes to sleep supplements. Melatonin is produced by the SCN in larger amounts the darker it gets. Melatonin is largely responsible for causing you to be tired and fall asleep, and peaks around bedtime. Supplementing with melatonin 30 minutes before bed can be very helpful for some people for not only falling asleep, but staying asleep as well. Melatonin is safe to use as has been researched pretty extensively with positive benefits for chronic pain conditions, as well as a number of cancers.

The effective dose of melatonin is highly variable between people, so I would recommend experimenting here. 1 mg of melatonin may work incredibly well for one person, while another person requires 15 mg. The standard effective dose however is 3 mg 30 minutes before bed.

I would recommend starting off with 1 mg of melatonin 30 minutes before bed and see if it's effective. If not up it to 3 mg and so on, to a maximum dose of 15 mg. My only caution would be that the larger the dose the more likely you are to feel groggy in the morning. For some people the grogginess with melatonin is an issue, while for others it's not.

If you choose a supplement make sure to dissolve it in your mouth under your tongue to increase its absorption. Also if you want to start with 1 mg just cut the tablets in half (1.5 mg is close enough to 1 mg to start).

## **Passionflower, Valerian, and Chamomile**

Passionflower and valerian are both great herbs for anxiety and sleep. While both of these herbs can be helpful for sleep, valerian is the more sedating of the two and is more likely to make you tired before bed. Passionflower is a calming herb which has been shown to improve sleep quality, but which won't necessarily make you tired if taken before bed.

I would suggest reading about these herbs in more detail in our supplements section below. If you're not a fan of supplements, then valerian tea is a great option to try before bed time. Passionflower and chamomile teas can also be calming and may help with sleep.

## **Lavender**

Lavender is another calming/relaxing herb, however here we're talking about using it as aromatherapy rather than as an oral supplement. We can use lavender or essential oils or as a dried herb. Using it as an essential oil simply dab a few drops on your fingers and rub the oil on your temples (this can also be helpful for headaches for some people).

Personally I prefer lavender as a dried herb. You can probably also find it at a local health food store or herbary. If you decide to use the dried herb put a bunch of it in a breathable bag (or just put it in a bowl) and keep it near your bed. You can smell it directly or knock around the bag a few times to spread the smell around your room. Or keep the bag under or near your pillow where you'll be able to smell it all night.

## **Tryptophan**

Tryptophan has been shown to be beneficial for sleep quality in those with major depression in a dose of 1 - 4 g/day before bed.

Tryptophan is also covered in more detail in the supplements section below.

## **5-HTP**

5-HTP can be very effective for both anxiety and depression, and has shown promise in research as a sleep aid as well. If you're looking for a sleep aid alone then 5-HTP would not be my go to. If you're taking it for depression or anxiety however then it may have a positive effect on your sleep. See the supplements section below for much more detail on 5-HTP.

### **Epsom Salt Bath**

Epsom salts contain large amounts of magnesium, some of which is absorbed through the skin. Magnesium not only promotes muscle relaxation, but can be quite mentally calming for some people as well.

Additionally, magnesium in combination with melatonin has been shown in research to be quite effective for sleep quality, so I would highly recommend giving this a go.

Oral magnesium supplementation may also be of benefit to sleep. Much detail on magnesium supplementation in our supplements section below.

## 4.5 Sleep Summary

So to summarize our key points:

1. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, ideally before midnight
2. Install a blue light filter on your computer and phone
3. Ensure your room is as dark as possible or buy a sleep mask
4. Only sleep or have sex in bed
5. Avoid large meals before bed and avoid physical/ mental stimulants before bed including exercise, caffeine and TV/computer
6. Exercise regularly
7. Avoid doing anything in bed other than sleeping or having sex

Also consider:

1. Melatonin - by far the #1 sleep aid supplement
2. Valerian, passionflower and/or chamomile tea - calming/relaxing before bed
3. Epsom salt baths - very calming before bed
4. Lavender essential oil or dry herb - scent is calming
5. Oral magnesium supplement - more details in Supplement section below

For me the biggest factor out of all of these is going to bed and waking up at the same time every day. If I have this in place then falling asleep and waking up is easy and consistent. I do however ensure that I always have my blue light filters on and also that I sleep with a sleep mask. I also exercise regularly and take magnesium, however largely for factors outside of sleep.

## **5. ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION SUPPLEMENTS**

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## 5.1 Why Supplements and Not Medication?

So I've written some pretty scathing stuff about traditional anti-depressants in our introduction, but am now discussing a variety of supplements. So what's the difference here? Why are supplements ok but medications aren't? Why just switch one pill out (medication) to bring another one (supplement) in?

Well we've gone into a list of the negatives of medications in the introduction so let's compare that list to supplements.

First off certain supplements mentioned here (namely B vitamins, vitamin D, and magnesium) are nutrients required by the body to function normally. These are *nutrients your brain and body need*, and deficiencies can cause exacerbation of your anxiety or depression. None of such supplements are going to cause any problems associated with medications unless taken in massive doses, so I don't think there's much more of a comparison required here.

Now however we have supplements such as 5-HTP, SAME, as well as a variety of herbs such as St. John's Wort, rhodiola, passion flower, etc. etc. These are not nutrients required by the body, so why are *they* better than medications. First of all the side-effects of many such supplements are non-existent or *much* milder than anti-depressant or anti-anxiety medications. That's not to say that there are no side-effects whatsoever to some of these supplements, however they mostly pale in comparison regarding the number of side-effects as well as severity (assuming you stay within the safe dosage range). I've tried almost every supplement on this list at one time or another and can't say I've ever experienced any real noticeable side-effect.

Withdrawal for most of these supplements is also negligible. This is a *major* plus I can attest to personally because I've experienced the horrors of medication withdrawal. In stopping a herb like passion flower or rhodiola you'll notice that you no longer benefit from the herb, however there is no actual physiological withdrawal your body goes through when stopping the supplement.

This may be a bit of a different story in supplements which affect serotonin (5-HTP, St. John's Wort, SAMe). St. John's Wort for example increases available serotonin in the brain just as SSRI's do, however it does so through a different mechanism of action. Even though it acts in a similar manner to some medications the withdrawal and side effects of St. John's Wort are much less severe (not totally absent, but much milder). I can attest to this personally after having taken both. If I were to do things over I would 100% take St. John's Wort instead of starting a prescription medication.

Another reason for supplements is that they *work*, many times as effectively as traditional medications. St. John's Wort was shown to be as effective as Paxil, and Acetyl-L-carnitine has been shown to be as effective for mild depression as Prozac! Acetyl-L-carnitine is a nutrient produced by the body which has a variety of physiological functions. It has absolutely zero side-effects and the fact that it's as effective as Prozac is a little insane. Although these supplements work, they do not tend to disconnect you from yourself in the same way that prescription meds do.

Also, some of the supplements on this list are beneficial beyond simply treating anxiety or depression. Fish oil is excellent for inflammation throughout the body for example. Probiotics can be very useful for digestive symptoms, skin conditions, ADHD, etc. (as we've discussed gut health is intimately linked with overall health of the body). Ashwagandha is anti-inflammatory and helps with stress and energy. Passionflower has been shown to improve sleep quality, and so on...

And one very last thing to consider is the psychological plus of natural supplements. Often people will just feel better taking something natural. In their minds (and in my mind because I identify with this) natural just feels better. It doesn't have that icky feeling a prescription med has. I think this is the reason for the current natural health boom... people just like "natural". This may seem negligible but it's important for you to feel comfortable and to like what you're taking. If you feel good taking something then it's all the more likely to help you.

Alright so let's move on to the actual supplements.

## 5.2 Essential Supplements

I want to start with two essential nutrients for mental health which many people are deficient in: vitamin D and vitamin B<sub>12</sub>.

### 5.2.1 Vitamin D

The active form of vitamin D regulates at least 1000 different genes, governing nearly every tissue in the body. Vitamin D is essential to the proper functioning of our immune system, brain development, absorption of calcium, muscular function, and so on. Moreover low levels of this vitamin have been linked to depression.

As you probably know, we get vitamin D (mainly) by being exposed to sunlight (sunlight triggers the conversion of a vitamin D precursor in our skin into the bioactive form of vitamin D), as well from certain foods. The problem is many of us – particularly those of us living above a certain latitude – don't get nearly enough sunlight to bring our blood levels of vitamin D to optimal levels. If you're living in Canada (like me), or any location where the sun isn't strong year round, it's going to be basically impossible to have adequate levels of vitamin D no matter how much sun you get even if you're outdoors all day.

Before jumping right into supplementing with vitamin D you should get your levels checked. If you live in a sunny area and get a lot of sun or eat a lot of animal liver then your levels may be fine, and we don't want to over- supplement with vitamin D (due to the possibility of vitamin D toxicity). The range for serum (blood) vitamin D is 75 - 250 nmol/L. As with many of these blood values the bottom end of this range is simply too low. Current research is showing optimal levels of vitamin D to be somewhere between 100 - 125 nmol/L. If you're below this then supplementing with vitamin D is a good idea.

The form you're going to want to take is Vitamin D<sub>3</sub> (also known as cholecalciferol). You can start with 1000 IU per day and retest your serum levels a few months later to see where you're at. Depending on your level of sun exposure, you're likely going to require about

2000 - 3000 IU per day to get your levels in the optimal range. In particular if you're a darker skinned person you will need a higher dose to bring your levels up to optimal. If after a few months you're still below optimal, up your dose by 1000 IU and retest again in a few months. *Also make sure to take your vitamin D with food*, in particular with fat. Vitamin D is fat soluble and requires fat to be absorbed properly.

**Note:** Sunlight itself (irrespective of its effect on vitamin D levels) is incredibly important and is something which is discussed further in section 6.

### 5.2.2 Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>

Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is another common deficiency which can have profound effects on mood and mental functioning. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is required for proper health and maintenance of your nervous system, for metabolizing our food, and for producing red blood cells.

If you eat red meat regularly then your levels of B<sub>12</sub> are probably ok, however I would still recommend testing. B<sub>12</sub> is a large molecule and inflammation in the gut can prevent its absorption, so certain gut issues can cause a deficiency in B<sub>12</sub>.

**Note:** When taking Cipralex I got my B<sub>12</sub> levels tested and was at the absolute low end of the range. This is odd because I eat red meat regularly and should not have been deficient in B<sub>12</sub>. I think it's possible that there's a link between anti-depressant medications and B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, however I can't confirm this. Either way supplementing with sublingual B<sub>12</sub> helped me quite a bit.

The range of serum B<sub>12</sub> is between about 200 - 700 pmol/L. As with vitamin D, the lower end of this range is definitely *not* adequate... you want to be more towards the middle or upper range (400 - 700 pmol/L). Luckily vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is super cheap and easy to supplement with.

The best form for supplementation is sublingual *methylcobalamin*. Do not use cyanocobalamin or hydroxocobalamin as they are not absorbed by the body very well. If you get your serum levels tested

and your medical doctor suggests either of these forms, still get methylcobalamin. Also make sure you get sublingual methylcobalamin. Sublingual just means “under the tongue”.

Sublingual B<sub>12</sub> is great because it is absorbed directly into your bloodstream and doesn't need to be absorbed through the gut. This ensures that you're getting it into your body properly. Simply put the tablet under your tongue and let it dissolve for 30 seconds for a minute and you're good.

Dose depends on exactly how deficient you are. For most people 1000 mcg (micrograms) of methylcobalamin once per *week* (not per day) is likely enough to get your levels to a good place. If your levels are very low then you may want to up that to 5000 mcg/week.

The good thing about vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is that it is non-toxic in excessive amounts (unlike almost all other vitamins) so you don't really need to worry about taking too much. Still, get your levels re-tested a few months after supplementing to see where you're at.

## 5.3 All Other Supplements

This is going to be a long list. I've compiled a list of the most common and effective supplements for mental health, and will list them in order from most to least effective in terms of historical use, as well as evidence based on research.

Many of these I've tried myself and can provide my own personal insight into their efficacy. This brings up an important point however in that *your mileage may vary*. What I mean to say here is that something that works for me or for someone else may not work for you. St. John's Wort may be a godsend for one person, while doing nothing whatsoever for someone else.

Unfortunately this is how things work. All of us are unique in that we have our own individual genetic code that is not identical to anyone else's (unless of course you have an identical twin), and we all respond differently to different things. This is why I've created this list in a certain order... so you can see what is *most likely* to be effective for you. To find out exactly what fits with you and your body you may need to experiment a little bit.

Lastly, some supplements will be for anxiety, while some will be for depression, and some for both.

**Note\*\*\*:** Always check that a supplement you're taking (or want to take) is safe to take with any medications you are on. Supplements and herbs can interact with medications. You can use the [Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database](#) to check interactions between supplements and medications. Type in the supplement you want to check and click "add". Select the appropriate option on the next page and click "add to list". Next follow the same steps, but now type in the name of the medication you're checking against. Once both are added to the list click "check interactions" to see if there are any possible issue with the supplement and medication interacting.

### **5.3.1 Brands and Where to Buy**

Unfortunately not all brands are created equally. I would highly recommend not buying cheap generic supplements at the pharmacy or grocery store. While some cheap brands are ok for things like vitamin D, vitamin C, calcium, etc., for other supplements (and especially for herbs) you're going to want to go with a quality brand. Low quality supplements have in some cases be found to not contain what they say they contain, and in the case of herbs may simply contain a low quality, less effective product.

Personally I buy almost all of my stuff from amazon.com. In most cases they have the cheapest stuff by far and they carry many quality brands. I live in Canada and some companies on amazon.com don't ship here. In those cases amazon.ca is an option, however for whatever reason the same supplement can be much more expensive on amazon.ca (or isn't there at all). It is possible here to use an intermediary (like UPS, FedEx, etc.) and use amazon.com to order to say UPS and then have UPS ship it to your location. If you don't like that option then just use your country's version of amazon, or see if amazon.com ships to your location.

There are of course many other supplement websites, so feel free to shop around and find the best price. There are tons of health food/supplement stores around now, so they are always an option too. Whole Food carries a ton of stuff, however in general I've found them much more expensive than amazon. The supplement sections in grocery stores are also currently improving in terms of both quantity and quality of products.

As for brands I can't name every single quality brand, simply because I probably don't know all of them. In my experience however, here's a list of a number of quality brands:

BioClinic, NFH, AOR, Natural Factors, Nature's Bounty, Solaray, Jarrow, Nutribiotic, MediHerb (good but super expensive), Sisu, Life Extension, Source Naturals, Nature's Answer, NOW, Thorne, Doctor's Best, Douglas Labs



This is for sure not a comprehensive list, but is a good start. You can find pretty much any supplement you need from the above companies. You can also read amazon reviews to see whether a product is rated well or not and decide based on that. In each category below there is a link to an appropriate quality supplement.

Ok so let's get to the supplements.

## **5.3.2 The Supplements**

### **B Complex and Magnesium**

We've already covered B12, however I want to cover the rest of the B vitamins (B1, B2, B3, B5, B6, B7, and B9). Talking about each individually would be too lengthy, so I'm lumping them into one as "B vitamins" (however we'll discuss B3 and B9 in more detail further down the list). B vitamins are crucial for many many bodily processes, including producing your neurotransmitters (serotonin, dopamine, GABA, and norepinephrine, all of which influence mood) and the overall function of your nervous system.

Taking a B complex is unlikely to have a drastic effect, however it may have a mild to moderate effect on both anxiety and depression. I know I said we'll start with the most promising supplements first, however I wanted to start with B vitamins and magnesium because they are essential nutrients to the body, while most of the rest of the supplements on this list are not. Furthermore deficiency in a number of B vitamins is associated with depression and other neurological symptoms.

If you're eating a solid diet consisting of meat, lots of fruits and veggies, as well as grains then you're unlikely to find much improvement from a B complex as you're already getting adequate amounts from your diet. If you're eating lots of processed foods or nutrient poor foods then you're much more likely to find some benefit here and I would suggest getting a quality B complex. Getting an adequate amount of B vitamins will provide your brain with the nutrients it needs to function optimally. B complexes can be calming

for some people and can be particularly helpful for those with anxiety.

**Note:** Even though most B complexes have some B12 in them, the dose is generally low. If you're deficient in B12 I would still recommend buying a separate sublingual B12 supplement.

Magnesium is one of the most abundant minerals in the body and is involved in countless bodily processes including supporting the immune system, regulating the activity of your heart, *activating B vitamins*, producing neurotransmitters, facilitating the release of neurotransmitters, etc. etc. Deficiency in magnesium can be common these days due to nutrient depletion of the soil as well as poor diet. Obtaining adequate magnesium can be quite helpful if you're deficient. Even if you're not deficient some people find the additional magnesium quite relaxing (both mentally and physically).

When taking magnesium you want to take *magnesium bisglycinate* as it is the type of magnesium best absorbed by the body. A standard dose would be 250 - 500 mg/day. You can typically get this in powder or capsule form.

Supplementing with magnesium may not be necessary if you're eating well, particularly if you're eating foods high in magnesium. Foods high in magnesium include almonds, Brazil nuts, dark leafy greens, as well as other nuts and seeds. If you don't want to supplement eat a couple of handfuls of almonds per day and make sure you get some dark leafy greens in.

**Note:** Use caution when going above 250 mg of magnesium bisglycinate at a time because high doses can cause diarrhea. If you're using a supplement that has 250 mg capsules then take them at different times of the day.

### St. John's Wort

You've probably heard of St. John's Wort, and for good reason... it has been used for mood disorders extensively as a traditional medicine, and moreover it has a decent amount of research which backs up its efficacy. St. John's Wort is basically your natural

alternative to an SSRI as it has been shown to naturally boost serotonin production and help with mood.

A double-blind placebo controlled trial in 2007 demonstrated St. John's Wort to be as effective as Paxil for the treatment of moderate or severe depression. For those of you who don't know Paxil is one of the most prescribed anti-depressant medications in history, and as we've discussed above it is also one of the most devastating medications to try to come off of.

St. John's Wort on the other hand is much gentler and has a fraction of the withdrawal you would experience from Paxil. We've discussed the pitfalls of psychoactive medications previously, however I just wanted to reiterate that for me this is ample reason to choose St. John's Wort over a prescription SSRI any day, at least as a first resort.

Get a quality product at an effective dose. Anywhere from one to three capsules per day can be effective depending on your level of depression but it will say on the product the recommended dose.

**Note:** I would not recommend taking St. John's Wort while taking another anti-depressant... in particular SSRI's or SNRI's. There is a danger of taking St. John's Wort with these medications due to the fact that they all increase available serotonin. Excess serotonin can cause something called "serotonin syndrome" which can results in mild to severe symptoms. Due to the fact that many doctors prescribe multiple anti-depressants to their patients I think this is unlikely, however for your safety I have to advise caution. Personally I have used St. John's Wort in the past for help with tapering off Cipralex with good results... but as I said above results may vary.

**Similar Note:** St. John's Wort is known to interact with many medications (not just psychoactive medications). If you're on any medications be sure to check its safety with what you're taking. Additionally St. John's Wort may cause some slight photosensitivity (sensitive eyes and skin to sunlight), however I never noticed this.

## Passionflower

Passionflower is one of my favourite supplements and can be quite effective for anxiety. It is a very gentle herb in terms of not having any side effects and interacting with very few medications (however again I would reiterate it's always best to check for interactions with your present meds before taking any supplements).

Moreover it has been shown to improve sleep quality. If you have anxiety this would be my go to.

I took two per capsules per day, however you could go up to four per day if necessary.

Additionally passionflower has been shown to potentiate the effects of St. John's Wort. That is to say it has been shown to increase the efficacy of St. John's Wort. What this means is taking passionflower can lower the amount of St. John's Wort you need to take to feel an effect. *The combination passionflower and St. John's Wort can be very effective for both anxiety and depression.*

Adding fish oil to the mix (on top of St. John's Wort and passionflower) has been shown in research to be quite effective, so we'll talk about that next.

## Fish Oil

Fish oil has become a fad over the past few years and its health benefits have probably been overstated in some cases. However in the appropriate dose and form it can be effective for mental health. Fish oil's efficacy on mood is due to its anti-inflammatory effect. We've discussed this in detail earlier, so I won't reiterate here.

Essentially fish oil consists of omega 3 fats which are anti-inflammatory.

Fish oil can have a substantial effect on depression as well as anxiety, however I would say less so for anxiety. I put fish oil at the top of the list because there is quite a bit of research to back up its efficacy, and moreover it is an actual food with benefits that go beyond mood due to its beneficial effects on inflammation.

With fish oil we're going to want to focus on dose and form. In terms of dose for mood you're going to want to take at least one gram of fish oil per day for it to have any effect.

Additionally you're going to want the oil to have a *ratio of EPA to DHA of 3:2 or higher*. For example a supplement with 600 mg of EPA and 400 mg of DHA is in this ratio. The higher the ratio of EPA:DHA, the better for mood (some oils go up to a ratio of 6:1, however they are very expensive and hard to find). EPA and DHA are both omega 3 fats, however when we're looking to anti-inflammatory effects we're looking more towards EPA rather than DHA.

Moreover we want to make sure we choose a high quality product which is pure (low levels of mercury and other toxins) and which will not go rancid quickly. Unfortunately all fish oil processing is not the same, and some companies may use fish species which concentrate high levels of toxins (mercury for example), or use a manufacturing process which doesn't remove these toxins when extracting the oil.

**So to summarize:** at least 1 gram per day with a ratio of EPA:DHA of at least 3:2 of a high quality fish oil.

You may also have luck looking in your local health food store for fish oil with high EPA:DHA.

**Note:** Be sure to take your fish oil with another source of fat as it will help with the absorption of the fish oil.

**Note:** Plant omega 3's from sources such as flax seeds do not have the same effect as omega 3's from fish. The omega 3's from plants generally come in the form of ALA, which can then be converted to our inflammation- reducing EPA. This conversion process is inefficient however and only provides us with a tiny amount of EPA which will not be helpful for improving mood.

## Probiotics

As we discussed in the gut health section above the bacteria in our intestines is intimately linked to our overall health. Disruptions in healthy gut flora caused by such things as chronic antibiotic use, c-section births, or lack of breastfeeding have been shown to have

serious long-term health consequences (mainly obesity and allergies, however the research is far from complete). Sub-optimal gut flora may also be caused by lack of fiber intake (fruits and vegetables), or poor diet in general.

Now I don't want to panic you by saying that you need a probiotic if you fit into one of the categories above, however if you are in one of these categories then there *may* be an increased likelihood that a high quality probiotic will be beneficial to your mood.

There have been a few recent studies showing benefit of probiotic supplementation on both depression and anxiety. We're not however at the point where we can say which specific strain of bacteria will be helpful, so be sure to buy a high quality product.

Most probiotics are sold in 10 billion units per capsule which is a tiny amount compared to the number of bacteria living in your gut (approximately 1 trillion). While 50 billion isn't really that much closer to a trillion than 10 billion, it is still better. If you find the higher dose probiotic helpful then you can try cutting down to 10 billion and see if it has the same effect. If not then bump your dose back up.

VLS (I believe) currently the highest dose probiotic on the market at 450 billion units per dose. I've personally never tried the stuff due to the high cost, however if you have the money for it you may want to give it a go. It may be particularly useful for you if you suffer from IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), Crohn's disease, or ulcerative colitis (in fact this is what VSL#3 was designed to treat). VSL#3 also has cheaper lower dose probiotics on amazon in the 100 billion units per capsule range.

**Note:** You may experience a bit of diarrhea or upset stomach upon introduction of a high dose probiotic. If this is an issue for you then try taking it every other day, eventually working up to every day.

## Valerian

Another very effective herb used for both anxiety and sleep. I put this one below passionflower because it can be sedating and may cause

tiredness for some. As with passionflower valerian also potentiates the effects of St. John's Wort and can be quite effective when used in combination with St. John's Wort.

**Note:** Valerian reeks. It does not smell good at all. In fact it smells kind of like dirty socks. If you try valerian don't be alarmed to open the bottle and notice a horrible smell.

## Neurapas

Neurapas is a proprietary blend of St. John's Wort, passion flower, and valerian made by the company Pascoe. Neurapas contains very high quality herbs and can be very effective for anxiety and depression. I have used it in the past and can attest that it is helpful. It is however quite expensive. The recommended dose would put you back about \$100 per month.

Neurapas isn't available on amazon.com (it is on amazon.ca however), but I found some [here](#). You can also just google "buy neurapas" for other sources. When I was using it I bought it in person from a naturopathic doctor. You may be able to do the same or find it at a local health food store.

Another (much cheaper) option would simply be to buy St. John's Wort, passionflower and/or valerian separately and combine them yourself. If you like the idea of having an all-in-one product however, then get some Neurapas.

## Kava Kava

Kava kava is probably the number one supplement for anxiety. It has a bunch of research behind it and anecdotally is quite effective. So why is it lower on the list than passionflower? Because unfortunately there is currently no standardized extract of kava available in pill form. Your option with kava is to buy bulk powder from a quality kava retailer and prepare a kava drink daily. I know, not the most convenient for most people, but it can be quite effective.

Another option is to get a liquid extract (i.e. tincture) of kava from a herbal compounding pharmacy in your area if there is one.



**Note:** When consumed orally kava powder (or drinks) will numb the back of the throat and/or tongue. This is normal and ok. Also, taking kava in larger doses can get you high and actually be quite pleasant/euphoric. I would recommend trying it :).

### **Rhodiola rosea**

Next on the list behind St. John's Wort for depression is rhodiola. This can be a very effective herb for mood for some people. Medi Herb makes a great rhodiola product, however it is quite expensive. There are other quality rhodiola products on amazon.

Technically rhodiola is categorized as an "adaptogen". In herbal terms this means it's used for stress and fatigue. The classic "rhodiola picture" would be someone with a high level of stress/fatigue who also suffers from low mood. If you fit this picture then rhodiola could be quite effective for you. If you don't fit the stress/fatigue picture it still could work quite well for you for depression (as I mentioned above everyone's different and it's hard to know which herb or supplement is a fit for which person).

### **Ashwagandha**

Ashwagandha is an incredible herb (and one of my favorites) with many benefits (backed by research), including being anti-inflammatory, reducing stress, enhancing brain function, helping with anxiety, fighting cancer, etc.

For our purposes ashwagandha is a fantastic anxiolytic (anti-anxiety) as well as being very helpful for fatigue and stress (as with rhodiola, ashwagandha is an adaptogen). If you're someone with anxiety and a high level of stress or fatigue, then ashwagandha could be a very helpful herb for you.

**Note:** Ashwagandha can also be helpful for head fog and mental clarity.

With ashwagandha you want to choose a supplement which uses KSM-66, which is the highest-concentration extract of ashwagandha available.



## 5-HTP

5-HTP works along the same lines as St. John's Wort (boosts serotonin), however it is a nutritive supplement, not a herb. 5-HTP is a direct precursor to serotonin: the pathway goes tryptophan → 5-HTP → serotonin.

Tryptophan is an amino acid (building block of protein) which we get from the diet. Your body then uses tryptophan to make serotonin (as well as other physiological molecules).

Research has shown 5-HTP to be as effective as Prozac for depression in a dose of 200 - 400 mg per day. 5-HTP has also shown benefit for anxiety disorders.

**Note:** 5-HTP can also be a helpful supplement for sleep. If you have sleeping issues you may want to try 5-HTP, however I highly recommend following the sleep recommendations we discussed above.

**Note:** 5-HTP can be used temporarily when weaning off of SSRI's to counteract the drop in serotonin you may experience.

If you're looking to use either St. John's Wort or 5-HTP, unfortunately I can't really guide you here on which will be more useful for you. For one person St. John's Wort will be very effective, while for another person it will be 5-HTP. I wish I could give you more guidance here, but it would basically come down to guessing. Based on the research both of these supplements can be effective.

## Tryptophan

If we want to boost serotonin why not go straight to tryptophan rather than 5-HTP right? Right... sort of. As with 5-HTP and St. John's Wort there's no real way for me to tell you whether this will be more or less effective for you. It can definitely be effective for both anxiety and depression, however some people will find 5-HTP much more effective. Contrarily some people will find tryptophan more effective than 5-HTP.

If you're more comfortable starting with a natural part of our diet, then I would start with tryptophan as it's an amino acid you consume

normally anyway. I would note though that if tryptophan is ineffective for you that doesn't mean that 5-HTP won't be effective.

**Note:** Tryptophan can also be useful for insomnia. Be sure to take it closer to bedtime. Tryptophan is also known to sometimes increase intensity of dreams.

## SAM-e

SAM-e is another nutritive supplement. SAM-e is produced by the body and acts as a "methyl-donor" in reactions which produce dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin. What this means is SAM-e donates a methyl group (CH<sub>3</sub>) to various reactions which require this methyl group for the production of these neurotransmitters.

The chemistry doesn't really matter... simply, you need SAM-e to produce several neurotransmitters in the brain.

Although serotonin is often singled out as the neurotransmitter responsible for depression, dopamine and norepinephrine are also involved in mood. While serotonin is the "happy" neurotransmitter, dopamine is responsible for reward, pleasure, motivation, etc. and norepinephrine is responsible for arousal, alertness, memory, sleep, etc. This is a big oversimplification, but can be used as a general guide.

Although most current anti-depressants target only serotonin (SSRI's), some target both serotonin and norepinephrine (SNRI's and TCA's), or serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine (MAOI's).

**Note:** TCA = tricyclic anti-depressant, MAOI = monoamine-oxidase inhibitor.

Anyway, back to SAM-e. SAM-e has been shown to be quite effective for depression (as effective as TCA's) when used in doses from 800 - 1600 mg.

## Methylfolate

Methylfolate is the bioactive form of folate (vitamin B9). First, why is folate important? Folate is required for the production of SAM-e,

which as we've just discussed is required for the production of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine.

Second, why take *methyl*folate rather than plain folate? The body converts folate to methylfolate, and it is actually methylfolate which is required to produce these neurotransmitters. The problem – for certain small set of individuals – is that they don't convert folate to methylfolate very efficiently and therefore may not produce adequate amounts of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Poor “methylators” (those who don't convert folate to methylfolate efficiently) may also have other issues such as fatigue and brain fog as well.

Studies on methylfolate have shown that it can be effective for depression, particularly in those resistant to treatment with typical anti-depressant drugs. In the studies the effective dose was generally 10 mg and above. There are several methylfolate supplements out there, however only a few in this dose range. If you have a methylation issue then a dose of 1 mg (common in B complexes or methylfolate supplements) is unlikely to be very beneficial.

Methylfolate may be helpful for you if you have a methylation issue and if you've tried typical anti-depressants before with no effect.

**Note:** I would not try high doses of methylfolate without before testing for methylation issues. We will discuss testing in section 11.

### Lithium Orotate

Lithium is reported by some to be a pretty powerful anxiolytic. Medically lithium *carbonate* is used to treat bipolar disorder, however it is used in much higher doses than the nutritional supplement lithium orotate.

Essentially both of these forms of lithium provide elemental lithium to the body, however lithium orotate is approved as a natural supplement. You may have heard of horrendous psychological side-effects of lithium, however these are related to the super high dose prescription lithium carbonate. Low dose lithium orotate will not have

these side effects and can be very helpful for some people with anxiety.

Lithium is thought to stabilize serotonin levels in the nervous system, as well as to regular sodium transport (important for transmission of electrical signals in the body).

### Acetyl-L-Carnitine

L-carnitine is an endogenous (made in the body) molecule with involved in the metabolism of fat for energy, neurotransmitter regulation, and neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to grow new neural pathways). Acetyl-L- carnitine is simply L-carnitine with an "acetyl" group attached to it, which allows it to cross the Blood Brain Barrier (BBB).

**Note:** The BBB is a tightly controlled barrier around the brain which is very "selective" in terms of which substances it allows into the brain.

There is a fair amount of research demonstrating L-carnitine's promise in treating depression and anxiety, apparently due to its action of neuroplasticity and neurotransmitter regulation. A couple of recent studies showed that it was as effective as Prozac for mild depression with none of the side-effects. Additionally there are some studies showing some positive effect on chronic fatigue.

If I were you I would give this stuff a try due to the fact that it is a nutrient the body uses, it's cheap, and it has no potential side-effects. It can be used safely in combination with other supplements you decide to use.

Effective dose for depression or anxiety is 1 g per day up to 3 g.

### Lavender and Oatstraw

Both lavender and oatstraw can be useful herbs for anxiety. They're analogous to passionflower, however less powerful.

You can buy lavender and oatstraw supplements(note the latin name of oatstraw is *avena sativa*). Another idea however is to try these as

teas before bedtime. Tea itself can be relaxing, however here you'll have the additional benefit of the anxiolytic effect of these herbs.

As I mentioned in the sleep section, simply rubbing some lavender and essential oils on your temples can be relaxing. Personally I like to keep a sack of dried lavender beside my bed. You can smell it directly or knock around the bag a few times to spread the smell around your room.

Passionflower and valerian teas can also be useful, however they will generally be less effective than their supplement counterparts. Also note that valerian tea will stink.

### **Gotu Kola and Bacopa Monnieri**

Gotu kola is an Ayurvedic (traditional Indian medicine) herb used traditionally as a "nootropic", i.e. a substance which enhances cognitive abilities (memory, mental clarity, word recall, etc.). It is also used traditionally for both anxiety and depression.

I have tried gotu kola in small doses and noticed a slight improvement in cognition and anxiety. I used a relatively small dose however (one capsule per day of the substance linked to below), so I probably can't comment on this stuff accurately. If you read around online however some people claim it's quite effective for anxiety and cognition.

I put bacopa monnieri in the same category because it's also a nootropic, and can be quite effective as such (with research to back it up). Studies have shown it promising for both anxiety and depression. Anecdotaly however some people find bacopa incredibly relaxing to the point where motivation significantly decreases. Based on historical use and evidence bacopa is worth a try, however beware of this potential side-effect.

### **Niacin**

Niacin (vitamin B3) plays many important roles in the body related to cardiovascular health, cholesterol metabolism, inhibiting inflammation, and the proper functioning of the nervous system. Deficiency in niacin can lead to depression as well as having other

neurological manifestations, however you don't necessarily need to be deficient in niacin to benefit from its supplementation.

Although deficiency can lead to depression, high dose supplementation is generally used for anxiety. I have tried high doses (up to 2 g/day) and personally not found it to be very effective for anxiety, however it works for some people.

If you're going to try niacin I would recommend starting at 500 mg per day and gradually increasing the dose to 2 g per day if you don't feel an effect at lower doses.

While you can take niacin directly, it is not the preferred form of this supplement as it *can cause severe flushing of the skin, especially when taken on an empty stomach*. This reaction can be pretty distressing for people, especially if it's unexpected and you have no idea what caused it. The skin gets hot, visibly red, and can be quite itchy. This is a normal response and will go away over time and is nothing to worry about... just an FYI. You may however build tolerance to niacin over time and eventually not get this reaction.

For this reason niacinamide (active form of niacin) is preferred (same dose... 500 mg to 2g per day).

**Note:** High doses of niacin is a first line natural treatment for schizophrenia and can significantly improve schizophrenic symptoms. High doses can also be effective in raising HDL (good cholesterol) and lowering LDL (bad cholesterol).

## Tyrosine

As we've talked about dopamine having a possible link to depression we can also discuss tyrosine. Tyrosine, like tryptophan, is an amino acid found in the diet. While tryptophan is a precursor to serotonin, tyrosine is a precursor to dopamine (and ultimately to norepinephrine). The pathway is as follows: tyrosine → L-DOPA → dopamine → norepinephrine.

I would put tyrosine pretty far down the list in terms of likelihood of affecting depression, however if you have low levels of dopamine then tyrosine may be an effective supplement for you. I would

recommend buying tyrosine in bulk powder as it will be way cheaper than in capsule form. Effective dose varies, however I would recommend at least one gram per day, up to five grams per day.

## CBD Oil

CBD oil is oil derived from cannabis or hemp and contains high levels of cannabidiol (CBD). CBD oil contains trace levels of THC (the psychoactive component in cannabis), and therefore CBD oil is not psychoactive and won't get you high.

We have CBD receptors in the brain which are important for neurological functioning, and supposedly in mood. There are many people on the internet claiming CBD oil to be *very* effective for anxiety and stress, with a minor amount of research backing up these claims. With the recent legalization of marijuana in some US states and the coming legalization in Canada, the amount of research on CBD oil will likely increase in coming years.

I put CBD oil near the bottom of the list due to the minimal research as well as the fact that it is very expensive, and in some places requires a prescription to purchase.

Personally I have tried high quality CBD oil from a high grade Canadian government approved source and did not find it effective for anxiety, however that's only my experience.

In terms of effects, you're looking for something with at least 15 mg or higher of CBD per dose to have an effect. If you're in the US then you can probably contact some high quality operators in Colorado to find a high content CBD oil. If in Canada then you'll need a prescription to purchase. Anywhere else in the world I'm not sure of the regulations or purchasing sources.

## L-Theanine

L-theanine is a compound extracted from green tea and is thought to increase the release of the neurotransmitter GABA in the central nervous system. GABA is an inhibitory neurotransmitter (as opposed to excitatory), meaning its effects are generally calming.



theanine can produce this effect for some people, however as of yet there are no significant studies showing it to be particularly significant for anxiety.

## **GABA**

On that note we can discuss GABA. Taking GABA itself is purported by some to be effective for anxiety, however there are no studies supporting these statements. Moreover GABA is thought to be unable to cross the BBB. Since GABA can't pass this barrier, then it is unlikely to have any effect on anxiety.

As such, I would not recommend GABA as a supplement for anxiety.

**Note:** Conversely L-theanine *can* cross the blood brain barrier and therefore may be able to elevate GABA levels in the brain.

## **Supplements Summary**

Alright that about sums it up for the supplements section. I know that was a long read so I'll provide a brief summary.

### **Top supplements overall:**

1. Vitamin D and vitamin B<sub>12</sub> - common deficiencies (get your blood levels checked for both)
2. B complex and magnesium - likely unnecessary in a balanced diet, however deficiency in both can cause a number of psychological symptoms
3. Fish oil - beneficial for both depression and anxiety, as well as improving inflammation throughout the body
4. Probiotics - can be beneficial for both anxiety and depression especially if you have a poor diet or gut issues

### **Top depression supplements:**

1. St. John's Wort - natural alternative to an SSRI
2. Rhodiola rosea - great for depression as well as fatigue and stress
3. 5-HTP - natural precursor to serotonin



4. SAM-e -necessary for production of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine
5. Consider methylfolate for issues with methylation

**Top anxiety supplements:**

1. Passionflower - the top anxiety “go to”
2. Kava kava - very effective, however no good standardized extract on the market now
3. Valerian - like passionflower but more sedating
4. Ashwagandha - very effective for anxiety as well as fatigue and stress
5. Consider lithium orotate

**Top anxiety and depression supplements:**

1. St John’s Wort combined with passionflower and/or valerian
2. 5-HTP
3. SAM-e
4. Acetyl-L-carnitine - modulates neurotransmitter levels in the brain

## 6. LIGHT

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We've talked about the benefits of avoiding certain types of light in our sleep section, now let's talk about the positive impact of certain types of light on mood.

## 6.1 Sunlight

Easy and free... I highly suggest getting a good dose of sunlight every day.

Many of us know that sunlight is essential to the production of vitamin D in our bodies, however vitamin D is not the only reason we need sunlight, i.e. if you're supplementing with vitamin D you should still make an effort to get sunlight directly on your body every day.

Now you've probably heard a billion times "stay out of the sun", "wear your sunscreen", etc. etc. I just want to make the distinction here that there is a massive difference between staying out in the direct sunlight for hours and hours vs. 15 to 30 minutes of sun exposure per day. For sure if you're going to be in the sun for hours at a time – especially in an area where the sun is strong (i.e. in the South or near the equator) – then you should make an effort to limit your exposure and wear your sunscreen. Sunlight can definitely be damaging in high amounts, however *some* amount of sunlight is essential to health.

So... irrespective of vitamin D sunlight is responsible for (or has been linked to) regulating your circadian rhythm (discussed in the sleep section above), *protection* from cancer, heart health, improved mood, improved brain function, proper development of the eyes, etc. etc.

With respect to this book sunlight has been shown to increase levels of both serotonin and dopamine in the brain, both of which can be involved in depression. Some people know all too well the depression that hits when winter comes and sunlight intensity and exposure diminishes, i.e. seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

So what do you do? Basically go outside and get 15 to 30 minutes of sun exposure daily without wearing sunscreen. If you're very fair skinned or you burn easily then you may want to decrease this amount. You definitely do not want to get an amount of sun that gives you a sunburn.

Now of course this is difficult in perpetually cloudy areas or in areas with frigid winters. Even if you live in these areas you should still make an effort to get outside. While the light may not be intense it is still there and is having some effect. Moreover light sends signals to your brain through your eyeballs (but don't look directly at the sun!), so it is not 100% necessary that the sun touches your skin (although at least some skin contact is preferred).

If you're living in one of these areas (or say if you have a job that keeps you inside all day) then you may want to consider getting a sun lamp. These can be especially beneficial to those with SAD, but can be effective even if you don't have SAD.

## 6.2 Low Level Laser Therapy

Low Level Laser Therapy (LLLT for short) involves the therapeutic use of light of certain wavelengths, specifically near infrared (IR) light. This type of light has been used for some time now and has thousands (yes really thousands) of studies backing up its efficacy for conditions such as musculoskeletal pain, thyroid conditions, IBS, diabetes, hair loss, skin conditions, etc. etc. Basically LLLT is amazing. It is effective, relatively inexpensive, and without side-effects.

**Note:** Therapeutic LLLT wavelengths vary from about 660 nm to 1200 nm (660 nm is actually “red” light and not near infrared light, but can also be beneficial). Most studies on the brain have been between 800 and 1000 nm.

More recently LLLT has been studied transcranially (through the skull) for conditions such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, brain injuries, cognitive enhancement, and mood disorders. For the most part the results are very promising. The studies on humans (there are several additional animal studies) for anxiety and depression are minimal, however both have significant positive results. Moreover there are several studies on cognition enhancement on humans, all with positive results.

In terms of how it works in the brain LLLT has been shown to decrease inflammation (a potential key aspect of mental suffering which we’ve discussed previously), increase brain growth factors, and increase ATP (energy) production.

Brain growth factors are what they sound like... chemicals which can stimulate growth new neural pathways in the brain. The growth of such pathways in the brain can play an important role in anxiety and depression because it allows us to break free of negative thought processes “wired” into our brains through consistent daily use. ATP is the body’s base unit of energy. It is required by all cells (including brain cells) to carry out basic physiological processes. As you can imagine, having optimal quantities of it fosters optimal brain function.

**Note:** This is getting a little technical for this book so I'm going to direct you to one of my favourite books *The brain that changes it's self*. This is a fascinating book which covers extensively the topic of the brain's neuroplastic capabilities, i.e. the brain's ability to change itself. This is definitely not required reading, but is a book which may help you believe that you really do have the power change.

Now I know, shining a light through your skull onto your brain seems a little crazy, however LLLT has been proven as a safe and effective treatment many times over. Also, I currently use LLLT on myself and have had positive results in terms of cognition with no ill effects other than a slight amount of fatigue the day after I use my device.

I'll get more into specifics on devices and how to use them, however first I'd like to encourage you to check out a video on one of the foremost experts on LLLT today, Dr. Michael Hamblin. This is a great interview where Dr.

Hamblin talks about many of the benefits of LLLT (including those on the brain), and its safety. Considering Hamblin's qualifications and his enthusiastic vouching for LLLT, I feel confident in recommending it in this book.

The video gets a bit technical in places. I'd recommend watching the whole thing because it's super interesting (and touches on some other things we've discussed in this ebook), but if you wanna skip right to the brain stuff it starts at 28:45. Special mention of psychiatric drugs at 52:28.

I'd like to state here that although LLLT is called LASER therapy, the laser part is not important. In fact, as Dr. Hamblin mentions in the video that LED's are just as effective and are much safer than lasers.

The device that I use – and the device Dr. Hamblin refers to specifically in the video – is this infrared camera now this is not a device specifically made for our purposes, however it is basically exactly what we want in terms of power and wavelength (it uses a wavelength of 850 nm). All it is an array of 96 LED's, all of which produce infrared light at a wavelength of 850 nm.

**Note:** If you buy this device you will also need to buy the corresponding power adapter shown further down the page.

**Note:** For this device also make sure you take the glass panel off the front as it can block some of the IR light from reaching your skull. It's easy to remove... just unscrew the screw holding the front panel on. Also make sure you press the device directly onto your head. Hair can also block some of the IR, so try to push the LED's through your hair so they're directly touching your skull.

I currently use this device for 30 minutes (6 minutes per spot), once per week at five spots around my head (forehead, top, sides, and back of head). As I don't know exactly how much of the light hair blocks, it may be a better idea to only use this on your forehead. I highly recommend you start slowly (2 - 5 minutes total) and work your way up. Also note that you may feel tired the hours or the day after you use it, so I like to use it before bed time.

Dr. Hamblin recommends about 10 - 20 minutes per day, so you may want to stick with his recommendation. I would ensure though that you take at least every second or third day off as you want to give your brain a rest.

If you feel uncomfortable with the idea of shining a CCTV camera through your skull that's totally understandable (I was too at first). There are plenty of actual LLLT devices on amazon (search for low level laser therapy device), however I've yet to find one in the 800 nm wavelength range and they're generally more expensive.

**Note:** I highly recommend any of these devices or something like this [FlexPad Pain Relief System](#) if you have chronic pain anywhere on your body (however you can also use the IR security camera). As I stated above, these devices are useful for a multitude of other conditions as well (pain, IBS, thyroid conditions, diabetes, etc. etc.).

## **7. MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION**

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Although mindfulness and meditation are two different things I've grouped them together because they're often recommended together. Both are becoming a bit of a fad nowadays, however they're both legitimate tools and effective for a multitude of conditions such as anxiety, depression, lowering stress, lowering blood pressure, and so on. Let's start with mindfulness...



## 7.1 Mindfulness

To me mindfulness has two components to it:

1. Living in the moment
2. Being mindful of your thoughts

### 7.1.1 Living in the Moment

Living in the moment is really the overall goal of mindfulness, and being mindful of your thoughts essentially helps to facilitate number one. So yes, mindfulness is essentially all about living in the moment. So what does that mean? Living in the moment means experiencing each moment of life purely as it happens. It means immersing yourself in life without the extraneous thoughts that surround most people's days. You're letting go of living *within yourself* to living *as yourself*, and in doing so letting go of the anxiety or depression that is holding you down.

Let's make an example: you're walking down the street thinking about a negative experience you had earlier in the day. Your thoughts move to what you're going to have for dinner, and then to dealing with work the next day or an assignment for school you need to do. Then you're thinking about whether you look good enough or if your hair looks right, and so on and so on.

This is not mindfulness, but it is how many people live their lives day to day. Mindfulness is not thinking about the past, or future, or even the present... mindfulness is about *experiencing* the moment. Mindfulness is walking down the street feeling the ground on your feet, the sun on your face... being fully present in your body and experiencing the moment.

Think about mindfulness as being a dog (or any other animal really, but I love dogs so let's stick with dogs). A dog lives its life immersed in every moment. When a dog eats it is focused on eating. When you throw a dog a ball every fiber of a dog's being is focused on getting that ball. Every experience a dog has is the truth of what that experience is, because it is living that experience in its fullest.

Now this is obviously way harder than it sounds. Everyone has stuff in their life they have to deal with, and it's not easy to forget it and just say "I'm gonna live in the moment now". Moreover our brains are used to thinking this way, therefore we naturally gravitate to this constant babbling of our minds. I think there are very few people in the modern world who have mastered mindfulness on a consistent daily basis. The more you work on this however the more you're going to be able to do it in the future, and the more you're going to be able to experience life.

This is a brief introduction to mindfulness and I can't hope to fully explain it to you here as I would have to write an entire book. On that note.

Before completely finishing mindfulness...

## **7.1.2 Being Mindful of Your Thoughts**

As I stated above, this part essentially facilitates living in the moment. In order to live in the moment and bring yourself away from your thoughts you have to be aware of your thoughts in the first place. This seems obvious, however when you're fully immersed in your mind you're not necessarily aware of the constant thoughts you're having. In being aware we're able to say "ok, I don't need to think about this right now" and bring ourselves to the present.

Another important aspect is being aware of exactly *what* you're thinking. Many people have some very destructive thoughts about themselves whilst being completely oblivious to this fact. You might feel depressed or anxious without being fully aware of *why* because you haven't explored your thoughts before. This is key and very important. You can't change these types of thoughts until you're aware that you're actually having them. More on this in section 12.

## 7.2 Meditation

Meditation is fantastic. Loads of studies exist on meditation showing its efficacy on mood, anxiety, creativity, stress, blood pressure, and so on. Essentially it is a tool to improve your overall life, however its benefits on depression and anxiety alone can be significant.

Meditation can be used alone to increase your ability to live in the moment. Meditation is very calming for the mind and facilitates this aspect of mindfulness, which is why meditation and mindfulness are often recommended together. You don't have to consciously practice both mindfulness and meditation. If you're not interested in mindfulness then just meditate, however I would recommend giving both a go.

**Important:** *In order to benefit from meditation you need to do it every day.* Meditation isn't something you do once in a while and all of a sudden you feel better. Sure you might feel a little calmer after meditating, but to fully benefit from meditation you need to practice it every day... *the benefits of meditation accrue over time.* A general rule is to meditate twice a day, 20 minutes each time. I understand this is a lot to fit into one day every day, so *aim for at least once per day for 20 minutes.* To make it easier on yourself schedule a time when you're going to meditate daily. An ideal time – and a great way to start the day – is to meditate as soon as you wake up.

There are many types of meditation, however in this book we will only focus on two...

### 7.2.1 Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation is probably the most common form of meditation you'll hear about. It essentially involves focusing on your breathing or doing a "body scan" where you focus on various parts of your body. The goal is to get yourself out of your mind and into your body.

You can also just search youtube for "mindfulness meditation", "bodyscan meditation".

### 7.2.2 Transcendental Meditation

I much prefer transcendental meditation and feel like it's a much deeper meditation than mindfulness meditation. Transcendental

meditation involves the use of a mantra which you repeat over and over again throughout the meditation.

When you get into “the zone” during a transcendental meditation it’s almost as if nothing else exists. You enter a calm, quiet space in your body and mind... absolute tranquility. You may see flashes of light or experience muscle twitches as tension releases itself from your body. It’s a place I don’t think is possible to get to through mindfulness meditation.

Through repeating this mantra your mind is able to detach from its constant active blabber. The mantra is a distraction which lets your mind go deep within itself.

This “zone” is not something you will be in for the entire 20 minute meditation... you will move in and out of it throughout. It is very important not to *try* to get into the quiet place. You can’t force it to happen... it just happens. When I first started doing transcendental meditation I struggled with this concept quite a bit and would be focused on trying to get to this place, but that’s the perfect way *not* to get there. As Yoda says “do or do not, there is no try”.

If you feel your mind drifting from the mantra just bring it back gently and keep repeating it. After a while the mantra can stop being an actual word and just sort of becomes a “blip” in the back of your mind.

I took a course on transcendental meditation several years ago which was well worth it, however it was expensive (about \$1000). Whether this is really necessary to fully understand and practice transcendental meditation I can’t say... all I can say is that it helped *me* to understand and use the method to its fullest. Moreover in taking a course you’ll be given a mantra which is tailored to you, which supposedly is important in the meditation process. If you’re interested in more guidance in this process just google “transcendental meditation + your city” and there will likely be courses or free information sessions available.

If you want to give transcendental meditation a go keep in mind what I’ve just written, and check out this video:

The guy in the video doesn't specifically call this transcendental meditation, but it is. I like the mantra he's chosen... "release". It's a great word when it comes to struggles with mental issues. Release the anxiety, release the depression, release control, release stress, release what's holding you back. Note that you shouldn't actually be focusing on these things while you meditate... I just like the significance of the word. Simply repeat the mantra and let your mind go away.

### **7.2.3 Other Meditations**

The Honest Guys (linked to above in the mindfulness meditation section) have tons of different meditations. If you don't like either of the forms I've talked about feel free to give any of these a go. They also have sleep meditations which you can try out for help getting to sleep.

## 7.3 Other Options

Some people simply do not like to meditate... meditation just isn't for everyone. If this is the case for you then other "meditative" options exist such as yoga or tai chi. I say "meditative" because that's essentially what these practices are. While you're not sitting still doing a typical meditation, one of the main focuses of yoga and tai chi is to experience what you're doing and bring yourself out of your mind.

There are a million different types of yoga to choose from. Your city probably has various yoga centers which have a variety of types of yoga. Phone or Google around and see which type of yoga suits you. Personally I have recently gotten very interested in kriya yoga. Kriya yoga is a much more spiritual form of yoga which is said to be enlightening.

Tai chi involves a series of movements performed in a slow, focused manner and can be incredibly relaxing/therapeutic for some people. If you're not into traditional meditations then I would highly recommend giving tai chi or yoga a go.

## 8. EXERCISE

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As with many other things in this book exercise is crucial not only for physical health, but for mental health as well. Regular exercise is conducive to improved mood, longer lifespan, lower rates of heart disease and cancer, etc. etc. There are many different reasons why exercise may improve mood such as releasing endorphins (feel good hormones secreted in the brain), improving circulation, boosting testosterone in men, “burning off” anxious energy, etc. etc. Moreover *exercise has been shown to directly boost serotonin in the brain.*

With respect to mood, a study completed in 1999 found that cardiovascular exercise three times per week was as effective as Zoloft for major depressive disorder. That’s Zoloft, one of the most prescribed anti-depressant medications in history. Moreover the study focused on *major depression*, not mild or even moderate depression. These are pretty major results for something as simple as exercise. And that’s not even exercise every day... just three times per week! This particular study focused on cardiovascular exercise at 70 - 85% of participants’ maximum heart rate.

Anyway, that’s just one single study. *Many other studies exist showing the benefits of exercise on both anxiety and depression.* Also, while cardio may be ideal it does not have to be your choice of exercise. I hate cardio so I understand if you don’t want to jog for 40 minutes a day.

In terms of weight loss and overall benefit to health many studies are now showing that short intense bursts of energy are actually more beneficial than long bouts of moderate exercise such as jogging. Moreover jogging can be very hard on the joints – particularly the knees – over time. Sprinting for example is awesome exercise (and if you’re looking to lose weight it has been shown to be more effective than cardiovascular exercise). Simply run all out for 10 seconds, take a break, and repeat 10 times. Do this 3 - 4 times per week.

Basically anything that gets your heart rate up is going to be beneficial whether it's lifting weights, jogging, swimming, biking, sprinting, or even walking.

Personally I'm a huge fan of walking and feel it's hugely underrated. Although it may not seem like you're doing much, walking absolutely provides overall health benefits. Moreover the act of walking itself can be very mentally therapeutic for some people.

So conclusion: perform your preferred form of exercise *at least* three times per week.

**Note:** Don't forget playing sports. You don't have to set out specifically to "exercise" to get benefit from being active. A sport like hockey is great because you're almost constantly moving. Something like baseball may be less effective because you're standing still for so long.



## 9. NATURE

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Humans come from nature. We evolved (if you believe in that sort of thing) in nature over thousands and thousands of years. We were in the sun, our bare feet touched the dirt... our entire lives were spent outdoors. Now (especially in the past 50 - 100 years) we're spending more and more time in doors, much of which is probably in front of one kind of screen or another. I'm not judging, I'm guilty of the same thing sometimes. I am however a firm believer of our roots in nature and in the importance of exposure to nature. There is an intangible quality to nature that is inherently therapeutic to us.

Old school "nature doctors" would often heal patients simply through time spent in nature, a focus on diet, and hydrotherapy (water therapy).

In terms of scientific evidence there are studies to back up these claims. Spending time in nature has been shown to decrease in hostility and depression, increase liveliness, and calm the mind. Simply google "mood and nature" and you'll come up with a ton of information on the topic.

If you don't want to specifically find a nature spot to sit in every day you can always kill two birds with one stone and do your exercise in nature. If you have a dog take them to the park, take a walk in some trails, read outdoors, hike, etc.

Also try to touch the earth directly. Many of us are totally 100% isolated from direct contact with the earth due to where we live (the city) and/or the use of shoes. We may go *years* without actual contact with the earth. So get out there and touch some dirt! There's no specific guide here on how much time you should spend in nature... basically the more the better.

## 10. NO PMO

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No PMO stands for no Porn, Masturbation, or Orgasm. For those of you who are regulars to these habits this may seem a little insane, but read on please.

Also known as the “NoFap” movement (“fap” means to masturbate) this is generally targeted at men, however it may apply to you if you’re female and you watch a lot of porn.

So, the main one we’re focusing on here is porn... the M and the O are secondary and optional. Now I’m a guy and trust me, I’ve watched a *lot* of porn in my life time. I’ve defended porn watching as being totally harmless and normal, so if you think quitting porn is pointless I get where you’re coming from.

It wasn’t until I came across the [NoFap movement on reddit](#) that I considered changing my ways. Many reddit users who have quit porn report an increase in mood, confidence, and motivation. The main reason for this is dopamine regulation. As we’ve discussed above dopamine is involved in mood regulation, but also has implications in motivation and confidence. Let’s stop for a second and watch this video about porn and dopamine:

[The Science of Pornography Addiction](#)

So as you can see we have a pretty solid scientific basis connecting the use of porn and the potential effects on complete disruption of our dopamine regulation. If you’re a daily porn watcher – and especially if you watch for hours at a time – there’s a solid chance that porn is having an effect on your mood and motivation.

The benefits of no porn may go beyond the direct effects of porn on dopamine levels. Replacing porn with a healthy behaviour such as meditating, exercising, reading, etc. can also have a significant impact especially if you’re spending a lot of time watching porn.

If you’re a woman and you watch a lot of porn I would still encourage you to give this a try as porn will have the same effect on your

dopamine.

While we're mostly focusing on porn here the M and the O can still play a role. There are different levels of PMO, going all the way from "porn free mode" to "monk mode" where you avoid any sort of sex or sexual imagery altogether

I can't comment for women, but for men I would suggest at least a trial of avoiding all P, M, and O. Porn is the most important, but abstaining from masturbation and orgasm may be of benefit too. What level of "NoFap" is effective will vary from person to person. Additionally how long you've been a porn watcher for can affect how long it will take for you to see results. If you've watched porn daily for years and years then it may take a month or longer to see results.

So that's it for this section. If you're still not convinced then I still suggest at least trialing no porn. You have nothing to lose whatsoever and it could have a significant impact on your mood.

## 11. DIAGNOSTIC TESTS

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Within the context of this book a diagnostic test refers to a blood or urine analysis which looks at various markers of your physiological functioning. In some cases these tests can be useful to elucidate the cause of mental or physical suffering.

As an example in our supplements section we discussed the potential issue of inefficient methylation (converting folate to the biologically active methylfolate poorly). Well some of these tests can determine whether you're a "poor methylator". Some tests also measure markers of bacterial or yeast overgrowth.

These are tests generally recommended by naturopaths or functional medicine practitioners and are typically not run (or even known of) by medical doctors. I was slightly hesitant to put this section in this ebook because I think it can foster a "something's wrong with me and I have to fix it" mentality.

There is however one test I want to discuss as it covers a vast array of physiological markers (including methylation), as well as markers of intestinal microbial overgrowth.

## 11.1 The Organic Acid Test

The Organic Acid Test (OAT) is the mother of all physiological diagnostic tests. The OAT is a urine analysis which measures over 70 different markers of physiological functioning as well as markers of intestinal yeast and bacteria overgrowth.

The purpose of the OAT is to essentially say “you have a problem with this, take this supplement to fix it”. For example an OAT measures levels of B vitamin metabolites. An abnormal number here can indicate a potential deficiency in said vitamin which can be subsequently remedied through appropriate supplementation.

Categories of the OAT include:

1. Intestinal Microbial Overgrowth
2. Oxalate Metabolites
3. Glycolytic Cycle Metabolites
4. Mitochondrial Markers - Krebs Cycle Metabolites
5. Mitochondrial Markers - Amino Acid Metabolites
6. Neurotransmitter Metabolites
7. Pyrimidine Metabolites - Folate Metabolism
8. Ketone and Fatty Acid Oxidation
9. Nutritional Markers
10. Indicators of Detoxification
11. Amino Acid Metabolites
12. Mineral Metabolism
13. Indicator of Fluid Intake

Each category includes a breakdown of a number of corresponding metabolites. To learn more about the OAT click here:

<https://www.greatplainslaboratory.com/organic-acids-test>

While I think some of this is useful I do have a bit of an issue with it. As I said above looking through this sort of thing can garner the

attitude of “there’s something wrong with me” or “I need this or I won’t be ok”. The worry about different aspects of your physiology can go on endlessly... trust me I’ve been there.

For example let’s say your OAT comes back and in the “neurotransmitter metabolites” section you find out you have low serotonin. A treatment for this would be 5-HTP (see 5-HTP in the supplements section above), which can definitely be helpful. However the thought then becomes “I don’t produce serotonin adequately and I need 5-HTP to be ok”. You can apply this thinking to almost every section of the OAT which lends to the idea that there is something wrong with your physiology and that your body as it is isn’t adequate.

*In reality however you have everything you need within you to feel happy and healthy.* This is a critical point which I will discuss further in section 12 of this book, and which I highly encourage you to read.

Having just said that there is one section of the OAT I want to discuss further...

### **11.1.1 Intestinal Microbial Overgrowth**

As we discussed in the Gut Health section above, proper intestinal flora is crucial to overall health. Overgrowth in our intestines with “bad bacteria” or with candida (a type of yeast) can have profound consequences on mental health such as psychosis, depression, anxiety, head fog, etc.

Now overgrowth with these types of bacteria or with candida is not something that just happens out of nowhere... you would likely have had to have been on long-term antibiotics, or have a history of overuse of antibiotics. Essentially what antibiotics do is wipe out bacteria in your body. Many antibiotics don’t distinguish between the pathogenic bacteria in your body and the good bacteria in your body, and will just go on a rampage and wipe everything out.

When it comes to the gut, wiping out the “good” bacteria leaves room for “bad” bacteria to come in and take its place. The resulting overgrowth of pathogenic bacteria can have significant long term

consequences. Many times this dysbiosis (microbial imbalance) will not right itself and we'll be left with the resulting symptoms indefinitely.

This is definitely *not* going to happen to everyone who takes antibiotics, even if you've done so long-term... some people are just more susceptible to overgrow than others. This may be something to explore however if you have been on many courses of antibiotics before or if you've tried everything else (diet, exercise, sunlight, etc. etc.) and your depression and anxiety refuses to improve.

While we're talking about both bacteria and candida here I want to expand further upon candida because it's such a big topic in the world of naturopathic medicine...

#### **11.1.1.2 Candida**

Candida is a type of yeast (which is a type of fungus) and is a very common cause of fungal infections. Now you've probably heard of fungal infections on the foot (or yeast infections in the vagina) however in this book candida refers to systemic (widespread in the body) or intestinal overgrowth of yeast.

There are many naturopaths out there who specialize in treating candida specifically. According to many of them everyone has candida and candida is the source of everyone's problems. They'll list symptoms of candida as anxiety, depression, head fog, fatigue, etc. etc. When you look at the list of symptoms it's easy to say "I have all of those, I must have candida", however all of these symptoms can have multiple causes. Google "chronic candida infection" or some other variant of that and you'll find much discussion on the topic.

While chronic candida is serious, it's not nearly as prolific as some people make it out to be. As I said above, these types of overgrowth don't just come out of nowhere. While every single person on earth has some amount of candida in their body, the candida cannot flourish and spread under normal conditions. It takes some sort of imbalance for candida to proliferate (for example say when broad spectrum antibiotics are taken long term).

Obvious symptoms of candida can be oral thrush (white lesions on the tongue or inner cheeks), chronic vaginal yeast infections, chronic skin and nail fungal infections, or super high cravings of sugar (candida eats sugar and can cause sugar cravings, however sugar itself is addictive and just tastes awesome so I wouldn't put too much weight on this one).

I would not recommend just going out and treating candida without confirming that you have it. Before doing so I would confirm with a test such as the OAT (see 11.1.2 for more details).

### **11.1.1.3 Treating Bacterial Overgrowth and Candida**

Treatment of these conditions is not the focus of this guide, however I can give a few general recommendations. In general I would highly recommend seeing a naturopath who specializes in the treatment of these conditions.

Treatments for both of these conditions are similar with a few additions to treating candida. Treating naturally will involve the use of multiple strains of herbs, each of which has its own unique antimicrobial mechanism of action. [Biocidin](#) is a very powerful herbal formula which can be used successfully for both candida and bacterial overgrowth. Another option is grape fruit extract which is also quite potent (I would not use the grapefruit seed extract alone as it probably won't be powerful enough, but it can be a useful addition to Biocidin).

In addition to these two products a high dose probiotic is also recommended (see supplement section above for guidance). Because Biocidin and grapefruit seed extract are so potent they can also kill the beneficial bacteria in your gut. As such we're going to want a high dose probiotic to ensure we're replenishing our gut with good bacteria so bad bacteria or candida don't move in again.

Treating candida is trickier than treating bacteria. It can be very resistant to treatment and will hang on for dear life. While Biocidin has been proven effective against candida, an even more powerful option are prescription antifungals such as Diflucan or Nystatin. These medications target fungus in particular and have the benefit of



not harming the beneficial bacteria in your gut. You will however need a prescription from an MD to obtain either of these, which may be difficult to come by (most medical doctors are not exactly convinced of the widespread effects of candida).

Moreover to treat candida it's almost always recommended that a "candida diet" is followed. This means no sugar whatsoever as candida eats sugar and feeding it will make it all the more resistant to going away. This also means restriction of several other foods such as alcohol, carbohydrates in general, wheat, fruit, etc. Simply google "candida diet" and you'll come up with tons of resources.

Now I am not an expert in treating candida or bacterial overgrowth and as such I would highly recommend the guidance of a naturopath specializing in this area. Moreover you shouldn't go about treating or candida bacterial overgrowth without a test confirming that you have either, which leads us to our next section...

### **11.1.2 Ordering an OAT**

So first of all an OAT isn't cheap... it's about \$300 US. Second of all for most countries you're going to need a naturopathic doctor to requisition an OAT for you.

Seeing a naturopath is going to add to your cost because you're going to need to pay for your visit. If you're considering an OAT however this is recommended because they will be able to interpret the OAT for you as well as recommend treatment.

### **11.1.3 OAT Summary**

In summary, I would probably forgo the OAT until you've given the other sections of this ebook a shot (don't forget to read section 12!). Conversely, if you have obvious symptoms of candida overgrowth or you've previously used antibiotics extensively then you may want to get an OAT to see if you have candida or bacterial overgrowth.

The OAT can also be useful to determine whether you have issues with methylation (see methylfolate in the supplements section if you

haven't already read it). Seeing abnormal numbers here can help determine whether or not you would benefit from methylfolate.

If you have the money and really want an OAT then just go ahead and get one. I understand the appeal of a test which can show you what's wrong and what's going to help you. If this is something you identify with then you should get an OAT. *First however I recommend you read the next section of this ebook.*

## 12. THE POWER OF YOU

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Although this is the second last section of this book, it is arguably the most important. While this book was created with a focus on supplements and natural treatments for anxiety and depression, no book on this topic would be complete without at least some discussion on the power you have to help yourself.

Your thoughts and beliefs about yourself are at the root of both your physical and mental health. Core beliefs such as “I’m not good enough”, “I need to be perfect”, or “there’s something wrong with me” (among others) can linger in the back of our minds and wreak havoc on our health.

Personally I held the belief of “there’s something wrong with me” for many years. Around puberty I developed an issue with expressing myself and getting my thoughts out clearly (it was more complicated than this but that’s it in a nutshell). Because of this issue I latched onto the thought of “there’s something wrong with me”. I held onto this belief and focused on it for years. It led me to considerable anxiety, the development of OCD, and eventually completely eroded my confidence and I became very depressed.

At the age of 22 I was all too happy to take the anti-depressant prescribed by my doctor because I thought it would “fix” me. The boost in serotonin from the medication did help me a little, however it did nothing at all to resolve the destructive core belief I held and my anxiety persisted.

It wasn’t until many years later that someone finally helped me see that there is nothing wrong with me... that I am totally ok as I am. It took me a while to gradually release the idea that there was something wrong with me (actually it took me years to finally accept this), but I have and I’ve healed greatly because of it.

Now let’s talk about you...

## 12.1 Discovering Your Beliefs

Unfortunately discovering your core beliefs is not always simple. People may be depressed and/or anxious for years but be totally unaware of the root beliefs causing their symptoms (this is where mindfulness can help to shed some light on the problem). Often these ideas can go back to childhood when we take something in as absolute truth, unquestioning its validity and internalizing them as truth. These ideas can sit in our unconscious without our awareness, insidiously guiding our thoughts and behaviour.

Unfortunately I've found psychiatrists and psychologists less than helpful in this area. Sure they had some good tips on changing my thinking habits or trying to get in touch with my emotions, but none of them even attempted to understand what *my experience* of the issue was.

I saw my psychologist for years with very little progress. I would often feel great leaving his office because he would reassure me that nothing was wrong with me, however reassurance is temporary... a day or two later I was back at square one. He never attempted to fully understand my problem and what it was like for me to experience it.

I don't want to totally bash psychiatry or psychology because quality of care will vary from doctor to doctor. Fundamentally though I feel as if both professions are lacking. There's more of a focus on "you should do this" or "this is your problem" as opposed to "what is that experience like for you?" It is in exploring "what is that experience like for you" that we get to the core belief. We get the answer as to the root of the problem *from the patient*, not from the doctor.

It's obviously not as simple as asking the patient a single question ("what is that experience like for you") and ending there. Understanding a person's experience of anxiety or depression will inevitably lead down a rabbit hole which will take the expertise of a skilled counselor to navigate properly and bring to its conclusion.

While I can note that these are *my* experiences with psychiatrists and can't be broadly applied to the general population, many people have similar experiences. We all know that one friend who goes to therapy... and continues to go and go year after year after year because they're not improving. They re-hash the same ideas over and over (as I did) and never get anywhere. Contrarily a single session with a counselor who can guide you through this process of self-discovery can be worth *years* of traditional psychotherapy.

**Note:** If you're seeing a psychologist and/or psychiatrist and finding it helpful then I'm not saying you should quit. If you like it and it's helpful then continue. I'm just trying to say that I believe there are deeper forms of therapy which psychology and psychiatry generally do not touch upon.

Now you either may not have the funds to pursue this type of counseling or may not be able to find such a counselor in your area. In terms of delving deeper into these concepts on your own, the book *Loving what is* by Byron Katie is a great resource which I highly recommend.

## 12.2 OCD, Panic Attacks, and Other Conditions

I want to note here that while core beliefs are important for plain old anxiety and depression, they are also crucial for offshoots of anxiety such as OCD, panic attacks, and pretty much any other condition you can think of.

This may not seem obvious... like “how are my beliefs about myself related to my panic attacks?”. However odd this idea may seem it is true.

Let's look at an example. Sarah has panic attacks once a day. When she's alone she focuses on her heart beating and worries that it's going to stop. Her heart beats faster and she starts panicking that she's going to have a heart attack.

Now Sarah could work directly on the panic attacks by coming to the realization that she's young and healthy and that she's very unlikely to have a heart attack. She could work on deep breathing and moving her focus away from her heart to prevent the panic from starting in the first place, etc. etc. While these treatments can be effective, they are superficial and don't get to the root of why Sarah is having panic attacks in the first place.

Perhaps through exploring Sarah's thoughts she reveals that when she's having a panic attack she feels terrified that she's going to die. By exploring this theme Sarah lets out that death for her means being invisible... as if she were totally gone from the world and no one cared. Going deeper it's revealed that Sarah feels the same way in real life... as though she's invisible to her family. This leads to the idea that she's worthless. By helping Sarah realize the feeling of worthlessness that she's been holding onto (something she's never really realized or thought about before), she is able to realize its untruth and is able to let it go. Once the belief is gone Sarah stops having panic attacks. *This* is true healing. This is a simplified example... perhaps Sarah would need to work on discussing her issues with her family or take time to release her beliefs, but hopefully you get the idea I'm trying to illustrate.

This is just one example... there could be a million different root causes to someone's panic attack. The feeling during the panic attacks may not always form a clear path to the root cause. A person may experience anxiety which builds over the years. The anxiety becomes so extreme that it spills over into panic attacks. Exploring the panic attacks doesn't lead directly to the root cause, but exploring the anxiety which preceded the panic attacks does.

OCD is another condition which can snowball out of anxiety. I've dealt with serious OCD in the past, and I know that the "itch" of OCD is an anxious feeling. As with panic attacks, in OCD you can work on the superficial. You can work on exposure therapy, and work on realizing that your beliefs aren't true, i.e. it's not true that if I don't turn off the light that something bad will happen. Again these techniques can help, but they are not going to the root of the problem.

For me OCD was an offshoot of my anxiety, ultimately tied to my lack of self-acceptance. Having attended many OCD support groups, I noticed a definite theme of lack of self-worth in many of the group members. People who felt "weird", out of place in the world, or felt like they were unimportant or worthless. I'm sure these ideas aren't true for everyone with OCD, but from my personal experience they seem to be common.

While we've only addressed panic attacks and OCD here, these ideas are important no matter what you're suffering from. Anxiety, depression, OCD, panic attacks, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, etc. Moreover, our thoughts and beliefs are not relegated to only affecting our mind. Destructive beliefs can manifest as chronic pain, digestive issues, auto-immune conditions, and so on and so on.

Alright hopefully I've adequately expressed the importance of your beliefs, so let's move on...

## 12.3 Acceptance

Without fully delving into the ideas explored above, we can examine a couple of basic questions on our own. For example, are you ok with yourself? Are you ok with who you are fundamentally at your core? Do you accept yourself fully and completely?

These are simple question which carry paramount importance to your overall health and well-being. If the answer to any of these questions is no, then this is something you need to explore further. What is it about yourself that you aren't ok with? What about yourself do you not accept?

For example "there's something wrong with me". This is an incredibly destructive belief that held me back for years. How could I be a happy fulfilled person when I didn't believe my most basic self was ok? The question then comes how is this idea serving you? How is the idea you're holding onto serving your life? For me the answer was pretty obvious... it was hindering my life on multiple levels. When we realize a belief is hampering our lives we see a reason to let it go.

Also important is the question "is it true?". Is it true that there was something wrong with me? No, but it took a great deal of time for me to finally realize this and fully accept myself. Releasing these ideas can be a spontaneous event for some people when they come to the awareness of the beliefs they're holding onto. For other people (like me) full acceptance takes time.

This section as well as sections 12.1 and 12.2 are brief introductions to the concepts of core beliefs and acceptance, and are laid out in much more detail the books I mentioned above. Perhaps what I've written here is enough to truly help you. If you've never considered your own self-acceptance before then simply exploring these ideas can be incredibly beneficial.

### 12.3.1 Acceptance and Supplements



I truly believe that self-acceptance and the removal of destructive core beliefs that control your life are at the root of all health... above diet, above exercise, above all. If you can master absolute self-acceptance then everything else in this ebook becomes less important (not *unimportant*, but less important). This is why I was hesitant to add a diagnostic testing section in this ebook. It directly fosters the belief that we are not enough... that the true issue lies within our physiology and we can take some test to figure out what it is and fix it. In doing so however the relationship between our fundamental core beliefs and our physiology is ignored.

For example we have low serotonin therefore we need 5-HTP, or we have low dopamine therefore we need to take tyrosine. While these results may come up in an OAT they are *not* absolute truths (although a doctor who runs an OAT will tell you that they are)... they are simply truths *at that moment in time*. What's interesting is that our thoughts, ideas, and emotions *influence and have a direct impact on our physiology*.

**Example:** "I'm not good enough" erodes someone self-confidence, leads them to become depressed, which subsequently leads to low serotonin.

Now let's say you take an OAT and it shows that your serotonin is low. Whoever ran the test will tell you that you simply don't produce enough serotonin and that you require 5-HTP. In doing so however the true cause of the low serotonin is not investigated.

The theory is that your physiology affects your mood – which is absolutely true – *however your mood (ultimately under the influence of your core beliefs and thoughts) also affects your physiology...* it goes both ways.

*Removing false and destructive core beliefs removes any hindrance preventing our bodies from working as they should.* What I'm trying to emphasize here is that *you* have the power inside you to feel happy and healthy.

Everybody does. But you have to believe this to be true for it to become a reality. You can go through test after test looking for an

answer as to what's going to help you, when the answer is *you*. Such a thing as a serotonin or dopamine or whatever other deficiency doesn't exist and has never been proven to exist.

I have friend who is in this exact predicament. She has been administered every conceivable naturopathic and functional medicine test, has tried every supplement out there, has treated herself for candida and bacterial overgrowth (which may or may not have existed in her in the first place), yet she never gets better. She's convinced that something is wrong with her and she will cycle through this never-ending search for what is "wrong" with her forever. The only thing she *hasn't* tried is exploring the underlying cause of what led her to be depressed in the first place.

If you truly don't believe that you're enough... that you don't have what you need inside of you to feel well, then this is something you need to work on. You can explore these ideas as I've laid out in the above sections, or again consider reading *Loving what is*.

**Note:** I do however believe in some exceptions here such as bacterial or yeast overgrowth as described in the diagnostic testing section above.

Now this brings into question the rest of this book. Why the supplements, exercise, etc. etc. if all we need is ourselves. Well there are still basic rules you should follow in order to provide your body with what it needs, such as proper sleep, optimal levels of vitamin D and magnesium, vitamin B12, etc. etc. This is all still important, and lacking in any area can have us feeling less than optimal and make us depressed or anxious. However having adequate magnesium to ensure proper neurological functioning is not going to release the idea that you're not good enough, that you need to be perfect, or that something's wrong with you. It will still *help* your brain function properly and can improve mood, but it won't solve the problem... that part comes from within.

In most cases getting regular exercise and sufficient magnesium and vitamin D (etc. etc.) will be enough to substantially improve your anxiety or depression, and you may not need the information in this

section. In some cases however this section will be crucial to help you to heal yourself. Also, sometimes mindfulness and meditation are able to get people over these false beliefs and core ideas without addressing them directly (sometimes, not always).

This worse your overall lifestyle is then the more likely the rest of the information in this book is to help you, i.e. if you absolutely horrendous diet, get no sun or exercise whatsoever, and just sit indoors all the time then the supplements, diet, meditation etc. will be huge for you.

### **12.3.2 Non-Essential Supplements**

So while I do believe in some “essential supplements” as well as proper nutrition, exercise, etc., that still leaves the giant section of mental health supplements in this book. While I don’t believe that anyone *needs* these supplements to function properly, that doesn’t mean they can’t be effective. They can be *very* effective, however I believe in most of them as temporary measures.

The path to self-acceptance is not always easy and can take some time and supplements can help along the way. There may be certain people reading this book who are suicidal or who have such extreme anxiety that they can’t cope with daily life. In such cases a supplement can be life-saving, and the underlying issues can be worked on while taking the supplement.

Moreover there are people who simply won’t want to deal with working on themselves and would rather just take a supplement, and that’s ok. Or perhaps in some cases it may be too painful or too difficult to reach the root of the problem. In these cases if you find something that works for you and that’s the way you want to go, then do it. Personally it took me many years to overcome my issues, and several of the supplements listed herein were very helpful for me as I overcame my issues.

Lastly there are some supplements in that list which are excellent outside of anxiety or depression. Passionflower and lavender can be excellent sleep aids for example. Ashwagandha and rhodiola are

awesome for stress and energy. Probiotics support healthy gut flora, and fish oil is good for reducing inflammation throughout the body, and so on.

So just one more quick word on this and then we're done...

## 12.4 You and Your “Illness”

Alright so last part of this section before moving on. So I put “illness” in quotes here for a reason. If someone has anxiety, depression, OCD, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, etc. then they can be labeled as having a mental illness. These are all categorized as “disorders” under the DSM 5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), i.e. major depressive disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, social anxiety disorder, and so on.

While these diagnoses can be useful to help people understand what is going on with them, they limit people’s abilities to see themselves beyond their diagnosis. People will say “I *have* an anxiety disorder”, or “I *have* major depressive disorder” as if this “disorder” is an actual part of them. The term “disorder” in itself implies that there’s something wrong with you. People will define themselves by their “illness” and can live under the shadows of these diagnoses their entire lives.

As I’ve hopefully adequately explained in the rest of this section, you don’t *have* anything and there is nothing wrong with you. Your anxiety or depression (or whatever it is) is not a part of you... it is an expression of your thought and beliefs about yourself (as well as potentially being linked to a poor diet, lack of proper nutrition, poor sleep, etc.). There is no such thing as a serotonin dysfunction (as we established in the introduction) and there is nothing wrong with you.

I’m putting this here so you can realize that you are so much more than your “illness”. Your anxiety or depression is such a miniscule thing compared to everything else that you are and that you have to offer. If this resonates with you or something you struggle with then please take it to heart. You may wish to journal about it as well, which we’ll discuss in section 13.

## 13. OTHER

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Before completely finishing this book I want to include a few more short sections which may be of some help.

## 13.1 Alternating Hot and Cold Showers

Alternating hot and cold showers have been shown to increase circulation, boost immunity, and boost testosterone in men (testosterone is linked to confidence and a “sense of well-being” for males). There’s no direct evidence for anxiety or depression, however that doesn’t mean it doesn’t necessarily help (it just means a study hasn’t been completed on it). I feel that anything that’s going to increase circulation – especially to the brain – has a potential impact on mood.

What you do: Take a hot shower. At the end of the hot shower turn the water as cold as possible. This is going to be very uncomfortable at first, but you’ll acclimatize (somewhat) in a few seconds. Stand under the cold water for at least 20 - 30 seconds getting it all over your body, including your head. Personally I like to hit the more prominent lymph nodes (armpits, groin, neck) as they house large portions of the immune system. I also like to spend some time on my head due to the circulation benefits and because I find it very refreshing. If you’re able to handle more, then turn the hot water back on for 30 seconds, then back to cold for 30 seconds and do another 2 - 3 cycles of hot/cold. The hotter/colder the water is the more benefit you’ll derive from this (*just be careful not to burn yourself!*). Always end the session with *cold water*.

## 13.2 Laughter Therapy

Laughter therapy essentially involves forcing yourself to laugh for a few minutes at a time. Take a deep breath in and let out a big belly laugh. The theory is that in forcing ourselves to laugh we are “tricking” our brains into feeling happy. I’m not a big fan of this one as I feel like an idiot doing it, however there are some studies to support its effects on anxiety, mood, and insomnia.

Personally I much prefer laughing at something I actually find funny, which I can find easily on youtube in a few seconds. This way you get the added pleasure of actually laughing at something. So, if you don’t like the idea of laughter therapy then spend a few minutes each day on youtube watching your favourite funny videos.



## **13.3 Massage**

The human touch can be very therapeutic. Whether you're receiving a massage, hugging someone, or just holding someone's hand there is some intangible benefit from skin to skin contact with another human being.

While massage can be incredibly relaxing due its direct effect on muscle tissue, the contact from another human is an important aspect.

A meta-analysis (an overall analysis of all existing studies) on massage was completed in 2010 concluding that massage helped significantly with depressive symptoms. So if you have the budget a massage 1 - 2 per week could be quite beneficial to your mood.

## **13.4 Support Groups**

Support groups can be quite helpful in commiserating with others who share your struggle. They can be particularly helpful for people who have never sought help and who feel that they're all alone. Just Google "anxiety support group xyz city" or "depression support group xyz city". If your concern is more specific (OCD, schizophrenia, etc.) then there's a good chance there's a support group out there specifically for your issue.

If you don't want to meet people in person then there are tons of options online for this sort of thing.

## 13.5 Weight Training

This one is for men specifically. While exercise is crucial, lifting weights in particular can have added benefits for men as it increases testosterone. As stated in the hot/cold showers section, testosterone in men is associated with confidence and with just feeling “good”. Moreover the muscle you will add can be a confidence booster in itself.

With weights you’re gonna want to lift heavy. Heavy lifting = bigger testosterone boost. Think bench press, deadlifts, squats, and chin-ups. Please however do not just stack a bunch of weight on the bar without being able to lift it. There are way too many videos of macho men on youtube lifting weights way heavier than they can handle. Ensure you have proper form (tons of tips on youtube) and use a weight you can lift for 3 sets of 5 reps each.

## 13.6 Underlying Disease

Hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism can both be associated with anxiety and low mood. This is something your doctor will almost definitely pick up on, however in some cases it can be missed. You may also noticed some pretty obvious symptoms in hypothyroidism (cold skin, thinning hair, slow pulse, weight gain, etc.) or hyperthyroidism (warm skin, rapid heart beat, weight loss or hard time gaining weight, bulging eyes, etc.). If you suspect either you may want to get some labs run to check your thyroid function (this can be done with the same blood sample you use if you choose to get your vitamin D or B<sub>12</sub> checked).

## **13.7 Pets**

No evidence on this one to back it up, but anecdotally many people find pets very comforting. Dogs in particular are unconditionally loving creatures which will shower you with affection and can soak up anxiety. They are incredible companions. Also, even though dogs aren't human, they still provide the benefit of therapeutic touch as described in the massage section.

I wouldn't just splurge and go pick up a dog... make sure you have the room, time, and commitment for one. If this is something that resonates with you though a pet can provide years of love and companionship in addition to helping with some mental health struggles.

## **13.8 Journaling**

Journaling essentially involves writing out your thoughts and feelings. For some people the simple act of getting these things “out” can be very therapeutic. For other people additional benefits may come from seeing what gets put down on the page. In writing out what you think and feel you may reveal things which you were not consciously aware of before.

This can be particularly useful in conjunction with section 12. Perhaps you’ve identified a negative core belief or something about yourself that you don’t accept. You can explore these ideas by writing them down in your journal and then working through them.

## **13.9 Getting Out of Your Comfort Zone**

Getting out of your comfort zone can be tough. Anxiety and depression can make us want to just sit alone and ignore everything and everyone else in the world. While time alone can be great, too much alone time can have us sitting there ruminating about our issues and making them seem worse than they are. I know this all too well from experience.

This one's a bit tough because of its cyclical nature. For example you feel like shit so you stay at home. In being at home alone you sit and ruminate about your issues and feel even worse. Now you want to go out even less, and so on.

As hard as it is sometimes, getting out and doing something can be a great distraction from your mind. There are countless things you can do: go hang out with a friend, join a sports team, join any sort of club that interests you, join a yoga class, volunteer, exercise, etc. etc.

Getting out of your comfort zone can involve just getting out of the house, but you can always push yourself further. For example if you have social anxiety you may want to consider Toastmasters or perhaps join a club or team which forces you to interact with people, etc.

## 13.10 Tapping

Tapping – also known as the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) – involves tapping various energy centers (meridians) on your body with your fingertips. Through tapping specific points on your body and focusing on bothersome thoughts/feelings, you are supposedly able to release such thoughts/feelings and be free of them.

This understandably may seem silly especially if you're not into spiritual or energetic healing, however many people find it helpful. Personally I have never tried tapping, however I have heard good things about it. I do like the idea of “releasing” what's bothering you... of making a conscious effort to release these thoughts/feelings from yourself.

Tapping could be particularly helpful in conjunction with section 12. If you're able to explore the root of your issue you can then come up with a few “tapping phrases”. For example perhaps the root of your issue is “I'm not good enough”. A tapping phrase you could then use could be “I release the idea that I'm not good enough. I accept myself fully and completely as I am”. Really *feel* in your core that you believe this and focus on releasing the negative beliefs.

I think it's possible that the benefit from tapping comes simply from this intention to release, however the tapping itself may confer some benefit. I believe the phrases you come up with and the intention you have to release them is much more important than the tapping itself, however that's just my opinion.

Either way if you're interested in tapping, The Tapping Soloution describes the process in much more detail.



## 13.11 Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple, quick, and effective technique you can use to calm yourself on a daily basis, as well as to help you acutely (in the moment) in times of anxiety. Most people tend to take shallow breaths without using the full capacity of their lungs.

In doing “belly breathing” we can expand the lower part of our lungs (the largest part) and increase the amount of oxygen we obtain with each breath. Increased oxygen absorption means increased delivery of oxygen to tissues, meaning those tissues (including the brain) function better.

If you watch a baby this is how they breathe... belly expanding with each breathe. For some reason we move away from this method as we age and use the upper part of our lungs and take shallower breaths.

Note that you don't have to keep your hands on your abdomen and chest every time you do this... it's just to assess initially that you're breathing with your lower lungs rather than your upper lungs.

Not only will belly breathing increase the amount of oxygen you take in with each breathe, but deep slow breathing has a direct calming effect on the mind. You may notice when you get anxious that your breathing becomes shallow and rapid. This shallow and rapid breathing can also send the signal to your brain that you're anxious. It goes both ways, i.e. your state of mind affects your breathing, but your breathing also affects your state of mind.

In this sense the whole process is cyclical. We can put a stop in this cycle however by changing our breathing. While shallow and rapid breathing = anxiety, deep and slow breathes = calm. You send a direct message to your brain that you're calm by changing your breathing. While it's ideal (but tough) to practice belly breathing on a consistent basis throughout the entire day, you can also use this technique in times of acute anxiety. For example if you get anxious in social situations be aware of your breathing and focus on changing rapid short breaths to belly breathing.

I'm also a fan of the Wim Hof breathing method:

This is not something to be done throughout the whole day, but something you can do upon waking or something in the morning before starting your day. Wim Hof (aka The Iceman) is also a big proponent of cold therapy (which we discussed briefly above with hot/cold showers) as you can read on his website.

## **13.12 Psychedelics**

This section is more of an FYI than anything. While I believe that both psychedelics can have profound therapeutic benefits they also have their dangers and can do more harm than good in some cases. As such I do not want to specifically recommend these to anyone reading this... I'm just putting the word out.

When speaking about psychedelics I am mainly referring to psilocybin (the active ingredient in "magic mushrooms"), LSD (aka "acid"), and ayahuasca (a spiritual drug mainly used in South America), although there are others which can be beneficial. If you're unfamiliar with these substances used as medicine then hard drugs may seem totally out there in terms of helping someone with anxiety and depression, but hear me out.

### **13.12.1 Psilocybin and LSD**

Both mushrooms and acid were researched in the United States in the 1960's for psychiatric disorders with incredibly promising results. Unfortunately Richard Nixon became president soon after the research began and outlawed their use for no real reason other than "drugs are bad".

Benefits from psilocybin and LSD appear to be from the actual "trip" you go on when you get high. These are both very spiritual drugs which allow you to view yourself (and life in general) from a different perspective. They may allow you to dive deep within yourself and explore negative thought patterns from a different light, allowing you to overcome their hold on you. Or they may allow you to simply view life from a more positive and appreciative perspective.

The profundity of these trips can be such that personal growth that would normally take years to achieve occurs over the period of a few hours.

In terms of actual physiological effects, scientists have found that LSD and psilocybin change the brain, allowing it to form connections it normally wouldn't and allowing for the creation of new neural

networks. As we discussed in the light section above, these new neural networks can allow us to abandon our old well-used neural networks associated with our mental suffering.

I highly recommend listening this CBC podcast about LSD and magic mushrooms and their therapeutic benefits. It discusses some of the history of the drugs, the science, and contains interviews with psychiatric patients who have benefited from these substances.

Within this podcast all drugs are administered in the presence of a psychiatrist specializing in their use, and they're used in a specific setting. These are calm, controlled, therapeutic settings which allow a person to explore themselves and to benefit from the drug. Going out with the intention of getting as high as possible and partying all night will likely not lend the same benefit. Moreover the drugs used are of high quality and pure.

So again I am not recommending you go out and do these drugs, this is simply to inform you of something you *may* want to explore. As with any drug there is always the chance of a bad trip, which may be all the more likely in someone with a history of anxiety and depression. So if you decide to go down this road proceed with extreme caution.

## **13.12.2 Ayahuasca**

You may have heard of this one. Ayahuasca is a plant-based drug used spiritually in South America and is becoming more and more popular around the world. It works in similar fashion to mushrooms and LSD, so I won't go into detail about it.

Ayahuasca is brewed into a sort of tea which you drink, and which may also cause you to vomit (which is normal). The ensuing trip can be very profound in terms of self-growth. Many people experience a renewed perspective on life, increased gratitude for loved ones, improved mood, etc.

There are "ayahuasca ceremonies" in most big cities now where you and a group of people will all drink and trip on ayahuasca together. It's also possible to travel to South America (normally Peru) and

partake in an ayahuasca ceremony under the guidance of a shaman. In Peru this ceremony will actually be done five separate times to fully benefit from the plant.

## 13.13 Homeopathy

Homeopathy (different from naturopathy) is an energetic medicine. You've probably heard of this one but may not be 100% sure of what it is, so I'll explain quickly.

Homeopathy works on the theory that you have an energetic "misattunement" in your body which is the source of your disease. We'll call this misattunement "bad energy". The goal of homeopathy is to find a "remedy" which has the same "bad energy" that you carry in your body. The remedy's energy pushes out the matching "bad energy" you have in your body, supposedly curing you in the deepest way possible.

The remedy comes in the form of water (actually it's usually a sugar pill coated in water) which carries another substance's energy. This other substance could be anything from snake venom to gonorrhea bacteria to a whole ton of different plant species, etc.

How this energy is imparted to the water is a whole other thing which we won't go into detail here. Basically every single substance on earth has its own unique energy profile which could potentially be used as a homeopathic remedy.

Note that the water does not contain any actual substance... it only carries the substance's *energy*, i.e. you would be at zero risk of obtaining gonorrhea or being poisoned by a snake whose homeopathic remedy you're taking. Some homeopathic remedies have been found to contain actual therapeutic substances which essentially means that they're not true homeopathic remedies and that whoever produced the products is lying to consumers.

Anyway enough about homeopathic theory. Having just read that you may think homeopathy sounds like total quackery (many people do), which is totally understandable. I mention it here because some people absolutely swear by its efficacy and it's something you may want to explore. Moreover I do think homeopathy has its merits, as I'll explain...

So, I have personally tried homeopathy and have not found it effective, *BUT* it was not totally useless to me. Seeing a homeopath can be very therapeutic in itself. The goal of a homeopath is to understand you in every way, as deeply as possible, without any judgment whatsoever. In doing so they are able to choose the correct remedy for you.

An initial visit with a homeopath can be very therapeutic. They will ask you question after question, going deeper and deeper into your psyche, your likes and dislikes, and all the weird and quirky things about you. Seeing a homeopath for me was refreshing after seeing psychologists and psychiatrists in that I felt I was actually *understood* (something I never felt with any doctor before).

Moreover there was no “you should do this” or “you should do that”, or any sort of judgment of any kind. Any question a homeopath asks is simply to understand better who you are. In talking about myself like this with total non-judgment I was able to better understand and accept myself.

So, I am including homeopathy here for this reason. Especially if you’ve never opened up like this you may find a visit with a homeopath very cathartic. Even if you have opened up before you will be understood at a deeper level with a homeopath than you likely have been before.

## 13.14 Acupuncture

Acupuncture involves the balancing of yin, yang, qi (pronounced “chi”), and blood through sticking needles in various points in the body along several meridians.

As with homeopathy acupuncture sounds a bit quacky, however acupuncture can be effective for many conditions – including anxiety and depression – and has many studies to back up its efficacy. Moreover it is an ancient Chinese traditional medicine which has been practiced for hundreds of years, which I feel has merit in itself.

A traditional acupuncturist will tell you that they can cure your anxiety or depression through balancing your yin and yang, etc. Personally (and through experience) I don’t believe that acupuncture is a cure for mental disorders. It can surely *help* alleviate symptoms in some people (in particular there are many useful points on the body to help with anxiety), however I do not believe it is a cure.

As with massage if you have the money you may find it helpful to visit an acupuncturist once or twice per week.



## 13.15 Naturopathic Medicine

Naturopathic medicine is essentially what we're been discussing throughout this entire book, i.e. natural methods of treating disease. A registered naturopathic doctor has four years of medical training similar to what is taught in Western medical schools, however treatments focus on diet, supplements, herbs, acupuncture, and homeopathy rather than pharmaceuticals.

Seeing a naturopathic doctor can be helpful, however many of the things we've already covered in this book will likely be recommended as treatment. If you want the specific tailored advice you'll get from seeing someone in person however, then you may want to consider seeing a naturopath. An initial appointment will usually be about 1.5 hours and include extensive questioning on various aspects of your health.

Moreover a naturopath will be able to treat you with homeopathy and acupuncture, however they will likely be much less knowledgeable and practiced in these areas than an actual homeopath or traditional acupuncturist. Some naturopaths also run OAT testing or other blood or urine tests.

**Note:** If you decide to see a naturopath then ensure they've graduated from an accredited naturopathic college and are registered as a naturopathic doctor. Some people may call themselves naturopaths or "naturalists" or some other variation of the word "natural" but have only taken a weekend or month long course on the subject.

I wish you luck on your journey of healing and freedom from mental suffering :).

Sincerely,

Robert Wayfair

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